

DEMOCRACY IN THE DOCK

GIDEON CLARK



DISCUSSION BOOKS No. 59

Recent world-shaking events have prompted serious minded people to ask whether Britain, America, and France cannot learn some useful lessons from those states which are avowedly anti-democratic.

Mr. Clark discusses this all-important problem with frankness and vigour. He places Democracy in the dock before Public Opinion, marshals all the witnesses for and against, and secures a discharge of the prisoner—with several serious cautions.

LITTLE
TALES
FOR
CHILDREN



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DEMOCRACY IN THE DOCK

by
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

For much of the information contained in the chapter headed "The Achievements of Democracy" I am indebted to Mr. P. Ritchie Calder, of the British Association.

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CHAPTER I

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

EVERY politically-minded man and woman, from the extreme Left to the extreme Right, will agree upon one point and one only. It is that democracy is now, in a definite and acute sense, upon its trial. That is to say, democracy is facing concentrated criticism, it has reached the—perhaps final—testing stage, its survival value is under the greatest strain yet placed upon it since its beginnings. It is daily and hourly being compared, in all its manifestations and activities, and often to its disadvantage, with rival political systems; it is accused of many faults, stupidities, and shortcomings—it is, in short, in the dock.

Should it go free, with credit, honour and support, or should it be ended as a failure? A third course presents itself. Should it be, as it were, dismissed with a caution; told to remodel and better itself; to learn from those who have accused it; to amend its errors and enhance its virtues?

A second point of general agreement, though perhaps less unanimous, is that if the political system known as democracy can withstand the present crisis in its fate it is likely to endure for generations. The mere swing of the pendulum will see to that. At present it is under a cloud; the cloud will pass. Nations which

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have turned away from it will come back to its doctrines and ideas ; broadening down from precedent to precedent it may become again, what the nineteenth century thought it, the natural government of all mankind. Everything depends upon its vitality, its vulnerability to the present shocks, its inherent strength.

Before proceeding to consider its chances of acquittal, of long life, its merits and defects, it will be as well to inquire into the meaning of its name, its history and antecedents. What is meant by democracy? No word of its kind is more common in the newspaper files of the past decade. It is flung about from day to day on political platforms and in private argument, and inevitably suffers in the process. To some it is sacred, to others a jibe, to most perhaps of those who use it the word has no particular meaning, or rather the meaning they wish to attach to it because of vague predilections or unexamined acceptances. It has its martyrs. A million men of British blood died for it in the most extensive and slaughterous war the world has yet known ; at least, it is what they were told they were dying for. One wonders how many of them could have offered even a random definition of democracy !

Democracy is widely confused with representative government, and often used as a synonym for liberty. If it means merely that the will of the majority shall prevail in political matters then the dictators of Europe can claim, probably with truth, that they are democrats, and the systems of which they are the head are democracies. Indeed, Herr Hitler has already done so. Speaking to three thousand German ex-Service men at Munich on November 8, 1938, he said, "Don't forget that I, the leader of Germany, have come to power according to the laws and the constitution of democratic Germany.

"I still command the greatest majority in Germany that anybody ever had. When they speak about our

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having destroyed two democracies in one year I can only reply, No, that is a lie. I have not destroyed two democracies. I, the arch-democrat, have in this year destroyed two dictatorships—the dictatorship of Herr Schuschnigg and the dictatorship of Herr Benes.”

The Russian Press, too, has been known to include the Soviet Union among the great democratic powers.

Further, it is a trait and symptom of the cynicism which has overspread international affairs that, relying upon the notorious inexactitude of definitions and the power of skilful dialectics to obscure the truth, statesmen of a certain type are prepared boldly to call black white. If challenged, they reply: Then prove it is not; and, after all, your own white is not so very white either. It is, in fact, streaked with soot.

Such arguments are difficult to answer. They obscure the main issue and divert the discussion into by-paths of semi-irrelevant detail. Even if it be admitted that the mass of the peoples of Germany and Russia desire the régime under which they live; even if it be further agreed that neither the English nor the French nor the United States system of government is a perfect democracy, it remains unshakably true that the word democracy has a meaning, and that a State in which one man has supreme and unlimited control in all the issues of peace and war may possibly have advantages over democracy, but is not, in fact, a democracy itself.

Towards the end of September of 1938, Britain and France on the one hand and Germany and Italy upon the other came to the utmost verge of war. The cause of the impending conflict was the partition of Czechoslovakia. Can it be doubted that if bloodshed had not been averted, if the young and middle-aged men—and the young and middle-aged women, too—of the democratic States had been summoned to defend and serve their countries it would have been on the plea, pre-

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faced with clarions and enforced with all the rhetoric of politicians, that they were required to defend democracy to the death?

It may yet be, unless the gods relent, that they will be so summoned, so spurred on, at some evil date in the future. Is it not, therefore, of the most vital importance that democracy should be defined and examined, weighed and tested, rejected if need be, served, if not, with knowledge as well as with zeal?

The *Encyclopædia Britannica* defines democracy, in effect, as a form of government existing in some of the small states of ancient Greece. Conditions of life, it is pointed out, have for many hundreds of years made the existence of a perfect democracy impossible. The inference is that the decisions of a perfect democracy must be made by all the people at one time and in one place. In other words, the victorious majority must be corporate and visible. It follows that as the slave population—in Athens, for example—was as great or greater than that of the freemen, and as women took no part in the assemblies, there has never been a perfect democracy, according to modern political ideas, in the history of the world. Nor is there any likelihood of one in the future.

"The essence of modern representative government," the *Encyclopædia* continues, "is that the people does not govern itself but periodically elects those who shall govern on its behalf."

Unfortunately this definition might, with very slight stretching, be made to cover the governments of the totalitarian States! It is the principle of the delegation of power, and the key-word would appear to be "elects."

Let us try some further definitions.

The *New English Dictionary*, after tracing the word to "democratia," which is found in a thirteenth-century Latin translation of Aristotle, defines the thing as follows :

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"Government by the people; that form of government in which the sovereign power resides in the people as a whole and is exercised either directly by them (as in the small republics of antiquity) or by officers elected by them. In modern use often more vaguely denoting a social state in which all have equal rights, without hereditary or arbitrary differences of rank or privilege."

A secondary definition is, "That class of the people which has no hereditary or special rank or privilege; the common people (in reference to their political power)."

Some interesting definitions by eminent individuals are appended. Such as :

Byron. "What is democracy?—an aristocracy of blackguards."

Mazzini. "Progress of all through all, under the leading of the best and wisest."

Bishop Hall (1614). "Nothing . . . can be more disorderlie than the confusion of your democracie or popular state."

Milton (*Paradise Regained*).

Those ancient whose resistless eloquence
Wielded at will that fierce democracy.

Jowett (1881). "We are called a democracy, for the administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few."

Lincoln's inspired "Government of the people, by the people, for the people," might, perhaps, be added, not so much as a definition as a statement of principle. Leaving aside the difficult question of implementation—of how the thing is to be, or should be, done—it is in itself an exact utterance of what most people in democratic countries mean by democracy.

Johnson, the Tory, defines democracy thus in his Dictionary :

"One of the three forms of government, that in which the sovereign power is neither lodged in one man, nor in the nobles, but in the collective body of the people."

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That seems pretty good.

Johnson quotes Locke :

“The majority having the whole power of the community, may employ all that power in making laws, or executing those laws, and there the form of government is a perfect democracy.”

But Todd's 1827 edition of Johnson defines “democrat” as a word introduced into our language soon after the democratical French Revolution. This is an interesting historical point which will be considered in due course.

A last definition may be given from a political and social writer of eminence of the immediate present, and one whose direct appeal to the masses has always been great. Mr. Robert Blatchford, in a recent newspaper article, writes as follows :

“To a mere non-party man-in-the-street democracy means the government of the country by the chosen delegates of the people, in accordance with the will of the people.

“If such government is to be wise and safe the people must be kept informed of the facts upon which the home and foreign policy of the government is based.

“If the people are misled, or kept in ignorance of the facts, the democracy is a sham.”

This appears to be perfectly clear and straightforward until it is critically examined. Then, as is the case with most of the other definitions given, difficulties spring to the mind. What, for instance, is the will of the people, and how is it accurately to be ascertained? Mr. Blatchford is dealing with the civil war in Spain. What was the will of the British people in regard to the civil war in Spain? Nobody knows, because the sovereign people were never asked.

Again, who is to decide what are the “facts,” and whether the people are being misled or no? No

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better example of the difficulty of answering these questions could be offered than the war in Spain, for the "facts" on both sides were voluminous, and the supporters of each were equally certain that "all right-thinking persons" were with them.

If a General Election had been held on the single question of whether the Spanish Republican Government should be allowed to buy arms in this country and elsewhere or not, what would have been the result? All that one knows with final certainty is that it would be impossible to get a straight answer to this or any other single question. The issue would be confused by party loyalties, religious feelings, a dozen other political topics of the hour, such as the Munich agreement of 1938, the condition of agriculture, and so forth.

Perhaps, for the purpose of discussion, it may be possible to provide a rough-and-ready definition of what the average Englishman, Frenchman, and citizen of the United States means by democracy. The following, after due care and thought, is suggested: "A form of government in which the citizens, *i.e.* all grown men and women, are consulted from time to time as to the major issues before the nation, and in which opposition to the existing government, in various forms, is tolerated and free to form a government of its own provided it can gain a majority by means of peaceful persuasion."

Holes could no doubt be picked in this as in most definitions. The Frenchman, to start with, would not completely subscribe to it because he withholds the parliamentary franchise from women. But in the main it will perhaps pass muster.

Whence comes this demand, this deep-rooted sentiment for elections, the consultation of the people, the freedom of oppositions, and all the other insignia of democratic government? We are told it is our heritage, that our fathers bled to win it for us, that it is the blossoming of long toil and effort. Did our fathers

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bleed to provide us with the blessings of a parliamentary opposition, to give us the right to vote for one of two men, each of whom, we may rightly suspect, is in the political game for what he can get out of it in money or prestige? Are these things truly in our blood? Should we stifle in any other air? Perhaps not, but the important fact is that we think we should.

Each of the three great democratic powers, Britain, France and the United States, has a tradition of resistance to authority. Modern historical research has shown that, in each case, the authority resisted was nothing like so black as it has been painted; that it had at least some right on its side; that the issues involved were confused and often ambiguous; that those fighting on the libertarian side were neither spotless, clear-minded nor unanimous; that in winning they often over-reached themselves; that the principles for which they fought mysteriously changed during the contest and emerged as something quite different. These things are true, yet the tradition remains.

Britain, in its resistance to absolute monarchy, France in the Revolution, and America by the Declaration of Independence, withstood and overthrew—by violent means, be it observed, not by votes—authoritarian, unrepresentative government. This our fathers did for us, for good or ill. It is noteworthy that neither Germany, Italy nor Russia has this same sustained tradition of successful resistance to what was felt to be tyranny.

The root of democratic sentiment is therefore psychological. Mr. Bernard Shaw has said that the people of England in the reign of King Charles I. were probably much better governed than the citizens of the modern United States; the only difference being that they were not consulted about it. There is a profound truth here. It is a fresh illustration of a hundred old stories of the superior efficacy of persuasion to force. A man will consent to do many

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things—even vote to increase his own taxation, for instance—which he will fight against even to the death if they are thrust upon him without his agreement, without even an explanation.

But here the advocate of authoritarianism will certainly reply: But the people in the Fascist States *are* consulted. They also are willing to increase their own taxation, to make sacrifices. Nor are they ever asked to make them without an explanation being given. When will this legend die that the peoples of Germany and Italy are kept down by brute force? That they are the slaves of tyrants, abject and crushed? If they are kept down, who is keeping them down? Can anything be more certain in an uncertain world than that the overwhelming mass of the Italian nation is behind Mussolini, and a similar majority of Germans behind Hitler and the leaders of the Third Reich? The fact is—undoubtedly an uncomfortable fact for democrats to swallow—that the Italians and Germans prefer their respective governments to democracy. They don't *want* democracy. They have tried it and it failed with them as it fails everywhere. What they desire and what they have got is a government that governs, that acts and doesn't fiddle away the years and the decades in talk!

There is room here for a whole chapter of argument, complete in itself. Many stories are told—and some are whispered—as to how the present régimes in Italy and Germany came into being. There is much to be said on the matter, and some of it will be said in the course of this volume. It may be that democracy was never given a fair chance in either country. It may be that, with man's customary impatience, the baby was thrown out with the bath-water in both lands, to say nothing of Russia.

It remains approximately true that neither in Italy nor Germany have the people a long tradition of democracy, the sense of an inborn right to criticize the

government, to complain of and seek the remedy for abuses by *argument*, to change an unsatisfactory régime.

Whence comes this tradition? What is there in the British blood, in British history, which have made and nourished it?

It is probably true to say that in the vague idea of most Englishmen their right to criticize, to resist, goes back to Magna Carta. This document, wrung from a tyrannical and violent king—as he is generally represented—by a band of insurgent barons, is generally thought to be the prime foundation of English liberty, the first act in a long struggle against authoritarian rule. Each year, on June 15th—the anniversary of the Charter's signing—there are public celebrations at Runnymede, the Thames-side meadow in which the event is supposed to have taken place. No doubt the rejoicings are a good thing; it is excellent that there should be a remembrance day for liberty.

Modern historians, however, are not convinced that Magna Carta meant much to the mass of the English people of 1215 or since. The tradition seems to have begun rather more than four centuries later. Indeed, a non-expert, "common-sense" view of the circumstances leads to the conclusion that the happening cannot have had the nature and consequences which are ascribed to it. The Charter was not sealed as the result of a popular rising; it was not a concession to the people at all but to a section of the Norman aristocracy, John's vassals, living and moving in a feudal world which has little political relation to the one in which we live. The very words in which the document was written seem in some cases to have lost their original meaning.

Professor A. F. Pollard, the historian, appears to have little sympathy with the customary ideas on the subject. The liberty which the barons extracted from the king was, he says, "liberty to every lord of the manor to try suits relating to property and possession

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in his own manorial court, or to be punished by his fellow barons instead of by the judges of the king's court.

"This is what the barons meant by their famous demand in Magna Carta for every man to be judged by his peers. They insisted that the Royal judges were not their peers, but only servants of the Crown, and their demands in this respect were reactionary proposals which might have been fatal to liberty as we conceive it.

"There is nothing about trial by jury or no taxation without representation in Magna Carta. Legally, the villeins, who were the bulk of the nation, remained after Magna Carta as before in the position of a man's ox or his horse, except that there was no law for the prevention of cruelty to animals."

It would appear from this that the case for Magna Carta as the basis of democracy breaks down. For similar reasons it is hard to accept the Victorian exaltation of Simon de Montfort as the founder of Parliament. Nevertheless, though he most certainly had no thought in his head even remotely approximating to democracy as we understand it, he supplied an idea—probably derived from the monkish custom of election—which, greatly developed, broadened, and modified, ends in the political institution we know as Parliament. But we must go back long before his time, to the Anglo-Saxon moots, to find the first germ of popular government in England.

In 1254 two knights were summoned from each shire by Royal Writ to find—*i.e.* to vote?—money for the war in Gascony, the barons as a body having refused their aid. In 1265 Simon de Montfort called an English Parliament of sorts into being. He summoned to a national council, or parliament, bishops, abbots, earls, and barons, together with two knights from every shire and two burgesses from every borough. Later, in the reign of Edward I., Parliament assumed

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elective institutions and free discussion was equally a victory against popery, prelacy, and the old happy-go-lucky England of the maypoles and the Christmas feasting.

Cromwell himself, in his public speeches, said that if religion were not the original cause of the Civil War, yet God soon brought it to that issue ; that, amidst the strife of battle and the difficulties and dangers of war, the reward to which they looked was freedom of conscience. That the Puritans were not themselves prepared to extend freedom of conscience to others is not to the point here.

It is this word " freedom " used in its political sense which comes newly to the eye of the historical student at this period. One has not encountered it previously. The Parliaments and the pamphlets of the early years of Charles I. began to demand 'freedom ; freedom to the people to worship in their own way ; freedom from the arbitrary commands and prohibitions of the king. The idea was new, and it was held almost exclusively by those who had thrown off from their minds obedience to the old universal Church with its precepts and doctrines against which no argument was permissible, and, equally, obedience to the new reformed Church which had taken its place in England.

Charles himself was perfectly well aware of this connection between the two strains of thought. He lost his crown and his head in the last resort because he would not surrender the principles of the Church of England and her episcopal government. His secret correspondence with his queen and her Council in France during his negotiations with the Scots in 1646 reveal this plainly. These attempts to reach an acceptable compromise occurred after he had fought, and lost, the Civil War. The Scottish leaders assured him that his restoration to the Royal authority or his perpetual exclusion from the throne depended on his choice.

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Let him but take the Covenant, they urged, and concur in the establishment of the Directory, and the Scottish nation to a man, with the English, excepting only the Independents, would declare in his favour. His conformity in that point alone would induce them to mitigate the severity of their other demands, to replace him on the throne of his ancestors, and to compel the opposite faction to submit. Should he refuse he must attribute the consequences to himself.

The King in his reply divided his objections into two classes, political and religious; but, as will be seen, the two merged. It was, he alleged, an age in which mankind were governed from the pulpit, whence it became an object of the first importance to a sovereign to determine to whose care that powerful engine should be entrusted. The principles of Presbyterianism were anti-monarchical; its ministers openly advocated the lawfulness of rebellion, and if they were made the sole dispensers of public instruction he and his successors might be kings in name but they would be slaves in effect. The wisest of those who had swayed the sceptre since the days of Solomon (James I.) had given his sanction to the maxim "No bishop; no king," and his own history furnished a melancholy confirmation of the sagacity of his father.¹

Unless, therefore, the view is taken that a love of "freedom," a rooted dislike of discipline, an inherent objection to arbitrary government is congenital to the British people, is somehow implicit in their blood and bones—which is to abandon all attempts to find a cause—then it seems reasonable and logical to trace the growth of British democracy in its modern form to the ideas and principles of the Reformation. This does not necessarily imply any sympathy with or antagonism to those ideas and principles.

If this be so, it is one of the ironies with which history abounds that Henry VIII., the most absolute

¹ Lingard.

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of monarchs, by admitting argument and reason into matters which had been considered beyond both, prepared the way for the execution of his successor Charles I., the exclusion from the throne of the Stuart family, and the downfall of the royal power. He opened the door to discussion only a little way, but it was enough. Men—some of them—ceased to accept ; they began to question, to criticize. They did not stop with repudiation of the Pope as head of Christendom ; they abolished the Mass. They were not satisfied—many of them—with the new reformed Church which took the place of the old ; they questioned its claims also. From the Church they turned to the State, their appetite sharpened by what it fed on, one step leading to another. If the Pope were wrong, so might be the King. They were men ; they had the right to consider, weigh, and resolve. It is irrelevant to argue that the new dispensations—both religious and political—were no better than the old ; one is tracing causes, not estimating results.

With the execution of the King and the final overthrow—as it was thought—of the Church of England, those determined and coherent masses of the people of England who had brought these things about looked for the betterment for which they had hoped and prayed. They did not find it ; they suffered the disillusionment which, it seems, comes always for the time being to nations which engage in violent revolution. They were no better off than before ; they had exchanged one set of masters for another—stronger, more ruthless, more able. Moreover, there was a new factor in the situation, one which had not previously existed, even in embryo. It was a standing army made up for the most part of seasoned veterans ; an army whose pay was perpetually in arrear, an army officered by fearless fanatics, an army with a vested interest in the new state of things.

From the confusion which followed the downfall of

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the royal government there emerged, by slow, deliberate stages, the commanding figure of Oliver Cromwell. By successive steps which, he explained himself, were forced upon him by "imperious circumstances" or, alternatively, the will of God, but which, according to his enemies, were the result of his own deliberate strategy and consummate cunning, he became Lord Protector of England, Scotland, and Ireland. For nearly five years he exercised a greater power over his fellow-countrymen than any Englishman has owned before or since; he was, in short, what we should now call the Dictator of Britain.

It would be an excellent thing if every student of democratic origins and comparative forms of government were to give some of his attention to the period of the Commonwealth and Protectorate. The broad outlines are well known, but the details are generally neglected; perhaps there is no commensurate era in English history since the accession of Henry VIII. of which the smaller events and personalities are less widely studied. It is important, because it is the one example in comparatively recent times of the setting up in this country of what its admirers would call a benevolent autocracy, and those who dislike it a ruthless and unchecked tyranny. The terms—as with other more modern dictatorships—are largely a matter of point of view.

Here it is not necessary either to praise or condemn the Protector. The facts may be allowed to speak for themselves. One point only must be premised: it is an insistence upon Cromwell's personal sincerity. It is impossible to regard him as a conscious humbug; if he deceived himself it is a common human failing, and, though his constant calls upon God as a witness—particularly when engaged in exterminating his enemies—sound odd to modern ears, allowance must be made for the fanatical age in which he lived. Moreover, the habit has not yet fallen entirely into disuse.

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Cromwell was as sincere in his good intentions and his somewhat narrow patriotism as Herr Hitler is to-day ; indeed, the two men have much in common. The Protector spoke always as though he did his work at the express wish of the Almighty ; so does Hitler. The German Chancellor has a violent antipathy to Socialists and Communists, in whom he can see no good at all. Cromwell's righteous hatred was for papists and prelatists, *i.e.* churchmen, who, for him, were outside the pale of mercy. Hitler, like Cromwell, is strong and successful and a man of abstemious life. Also, he is a man with a mission.

But the likeness does not stop there. Between some of the acts and methods of Hitler as Reich Chancellor and those of Cromwell at the zenith of his power and glory as Lord Protector there is a similarity which, allowing for the differences in circumstance and period, is astonishing. When Cromwell—then Lord General—dissolved the Long Parliament, or rather the Rump, by the forcible means of a band of soldiers, he addressed the House.

"At first," says Lingard, "his language was decorous and even laudatory. Gradually, he became more warm and animated ; at last he assumed all the vehemence of passion and indulged in personal vituperation. He charged the members with self-seeking and profaneness ; with the frequent denial of justice and numerous acts of oppression ; with idolizing the lawyers, the constant advocates of tyranny ; with neglecting the men who had bled for them in the field that they might gain the Presbyterians who had apostatized from the cause, and with doing all this in order to perpetuate their own power and to replenish their own purses. But their time was come ; the Lord had disowned them ; He had chosen more worthy instruments to perform His work."

Has not this diatribe a familiar ring ?

Later, springing from his place, he exclaimed :

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"Come, come, sir, I will put an end to your prating"; and after the soldiers had been called in to eject the members of the thrice-purged, once-sacred House of Commons, he said: "It is you that have forced me to do this. I have sought the Lord both day and night that He would rather slay me than put me on the doing of this work."

The truth was that in Cromwell's view the Parliament talked too much and did too little, which is precisely the charge invariably made against deliberative assemblies by dictators and would-be dictators.

While still Lord General, Cromwell summoned another Parliament, a Parliament modelled on principles then unknown to the history of this or any other nation. It was to be a Parliament of saints, of men who had not offered themselves as candidates or been chosen by the people, but whose chief qualification consisted in holiness of life and whose call to the office of legislators came from the choice of the Council, *i.e.* Cromwell's Council.

"With this view," says Lingard, "the ministers took the sense of the congregational churches in the several counties; the returns contained the names of the persons, 'faithful, fearing God and hating covetousness' who were deemed qualified for this high and important trust. Out of these the Council, in the presence of the Lord General, selected one hundred and thirty-nine representatives for England, six for Wales, six for Ireland and five for Scotland."

Is there not a resemblance here to the method of selecting members of the Reichstag? The only differences would appear to be in the numbers and in the fact that the Germans are chosen not for holiness of life but for rigid adherence to Nazi principles.

But the Lord General soon tired of this Parliament. It, also, talked too much; and, moreover, it did not behave as he wished that it should. So he dissolved it, and made himself Lord Protector.

He then summoned a new Parliament. Addressing the members at their opening meeting, he described the state of the nation at the close of the last Parliament. It was agitated, he said, by the principles of the Levellers, tending to reduce all to an equality ; by the doctrines of the Fifth-monarchy men, subversive of civil government ; by religious theorists, the pretended champions of liberty of conscience, who condemned an established ministry as Babylonish and anti-Christian ; and by swarms of Jesuits, who had settled in England an episcopal jurisdiction to pervert the people.

At the same time the naval war with Holland absorbed all the pecuniary resources, while a commercial war with France and Portugal cramped the industry of the nation.

He then bade them contrast this picture with the existing state of things. The taxes had been reduced ; judges of talent and integrity had been placed upon the bench ; the burthen of the commissioners of the Great Seal had been lightened by the removal of many descriptions of causes from the Court of Chancery to the ordinary courts of law ; and a stop had been put to that heady way for every man who pleased to become a preacher.

The war with Holland had terminated in an advantageous peace ; treaties of commerce and amity had been concluded with Denmark and Sweden ; a similar treaty, which would place the British trader beyond the reach of the Inquisition, had been signed with Portugal, and another was in progress with the ambassador of the French monarch. Thus had the Government (in the absence of Parliament) brought the three nations by hasty strides towards the land of promise ; it was for the Parliament to introduce them into it. The prospect was bright before them ; let them not look back to the onions and flesh-pots of Egypt.

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He spoke not as their lord, but their fellow-servant, a labourer with them in the same good work.

Can we not detect here a faint echo, or rather a pre-voicing, of very similar sentiments, with the same queer mixture of promise and menace, which were to be uttered nearly three centuries later?

When we come to examine the acts as apart from the speeches of Cromwell we discover the same odd parallel.

Colonel Lilburne was leader of the Levellers, a large body of republicans and revolutionaries who really meant what they said when they demanded freedom, equality, and toleration. He was an old Roundhead veteran of inviolate principles who hated the Lord Protector and regarded him as a hypocrite, a turncoat, and a traitor. Lilburne had been in exile; he returned at his own risk and was at once arrested. He was arraigned at the sessions, and defended himself with magnificent skill and courage. At length the time drew near for judgment and there was great excitement among the people. Pamphlets were circulated saying that if Lilburne perished twenty thousand individuals would perish with him. Cromwell, to encourage the court, posted two companies of soldiers in the immediate vicinity, quartered three regiments of infantry and one of cavalry in the City and ordered another numerous force to march towards London.

The jury found Lilburne not guilty. Cromwell at once obtained an order from the House that, notwithstanding his acquittal, he should be confined to the Tower, and that no obedience should be paid to any writ of habeas corpus issued from the Court of Upper Bench on his behalf.

The names of Dimitroff and Pastor Niemoller leap to the mind—Dimitroff because of his superb defence against a hostile court, and Niemoller because of his second arrest immediately upon acquittal. The case

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of Lilburne would appear to be a perfect pre-figuring combination of the two.

The Lord Protector was not hostile to the Jews. Indeed, he extended to them his protection. He had, however, good reason to dislike the Irish—and they him! After the conquest of Jamaica in 1655 the Lord Protector, in order to people it, transported a thousand Irish boys and a thousand Irish girls to the island. Compulsion was, of course, used to effect the exile. This remarkable fact is proved by a letter from Henry Cromwell, Lord Deputy of Ireland, to his father, and by a reply sent by Thurloe, secretary of the Council.

While it would be fantastic to push the parallel too far, the likeness between this act of singular callousness and Hitler's mass banishment of the Jews is revealed in its severity and ruthlessness. Just as Herr Hitler appears to regard the Jewish people as beyond the pale of mercy and ordinary human fairness, so Cromwell viewed the Irish. At least, there is no other excuse for his conduct. They were papists, they had fought for the king, they would not willingly accept either his religion or his government. Away with them! They must be treated as animals.

A number of other points at which the careers of the two dictators seem to touch are to be found for the searching. One must suffice here. The Venetian Ambassador observed that during the Protectorate London wore the appearance of a garrison town, where nothing was to be seen but the marching of soldiers, nothing to be heard but the sound of drums and trumpets. Every visitor to present-day Germany remarks upon precisely the same thing—soldiers, soldiers and uniforms everywhere!

The matter which concerns us here is democracy, its growth and its vicissitudes. Is it fanciful to believe that the rooted dislike of dictatorships, of military government, of arbitrary discipline which prevails among our people is due to their unfading memory of

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the Lord Protector and his power? Deep in the national consciousness is the knowledge that we have tried dictatorship—benevolent autocracy, if the term is preferred—and found it wanting in humanity, toleration, elasticity, the spirit of give-and-take, of live-and-let-live. It was too harsh, too stern, too strong, and no opposition was allowed.

We had our British dictator nearly three hundred years ago, and he was a good dictator as dictators go ! He was powerful, patriotic, and victorious. He raised the name and the honour of England in the eyes of the world, and swept the seas with the English fleet. He had the domestic virtues and was non-self-indulgent. He was a God-fearing man, and he certainly might have been even more tyrannous than he actually was—in England, at any rate. But the measure of the popular hatred of his government is best shown by the exultant joy with which the nation welcomed back the king. Dislike of dictatorship probably had more to do with the delirium of the Restoration than the personal charm of Charles II.

Cromwell died at fifty-eight. He might have lived for another twenty years. If he had, who would have unseated him ? During his Protectorate and earlier there were continual risings against his government, continual plots. All were completely abortive. A strong ruler backed by armed forces whose interest is, in the main, one with his, is very hard to overthrow. England might have groaned for decades, if destiny had so decided, under a Puritan oligarchy and suffered, in the ultimate attempt to dislodge it, a cataclysm equal to the French Revolution. Such an outcome would perhaps have been a good thing in the long run ; possibly not. It might have led, as in France, to a military dictatorship of a different nature. At least it may be said that the experiment is not one to be repeated ; it may be added with confidence that eighty-five per cent. of the nation would agree in this.

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Since 1660, Parliament has continued to function without serious interruption. This does not mean that Britain has been a democracy since the Restoration. We are concerned here not with the development of the House of Commons, but with the growth of the democratic idea, and perhaps all that can be said on this issue is that an Opposition of sorts was maintained through the remainder of the seventeenth century and all through the eighteenth century until the great days of Fox and Sheridan.

Tories and Whigs combined to turn out James II.—the unfortunate, the maladroit, the humourless, the unbending. As in an age of fierce religious passions he was so unwise as to practise a faith different from that of the overwhelming majority of his subjects, it was probably inevitable that he should go. The people were not asked, of course ; but then it would never have occurred to any one, not even to the king himself, that they should be.

Nearly seventy-five years later, we find John Wilkes uttering sentiments with a marked democratic ring. In the first number of the *North Briton*, for example, he wrote, "I will exert the undoubted privilege of every North Briton, that of speaking my opinion freely on every subject that concerns the community of which I am a member." During the disturbances of which he was the prime cause, too, the word "liberty" began again to be heard in the land. The *Middlesex Journal* took as its sub-title "The Chronicle of Liberty."

Even at this period, too, what we should call democratic traits were visible among the English to the eyes of a foreigner. Voltaire, reputed the acutest observer in Europe, writing in 1733, used these words : "The English nation is the only one on earth which has managed to regulate the power of its kings while resisting them ; where the lords are great without insolence and without vassals, and where the people takes part in the government without confusion. In

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England it is common to think ; and literature has more honour than with us French. This advantage is a necessary outcome of their form of government."

Perhaps Voltaire had the partiality of a visitor ; probably he was a little blinded by the grandeur of Parliament, a counterpart to which did not exist in his own country.

So to the French Revolution and the coming of the conscious democratic idea. Men and women in Britain—some of them—stirred by the renaissance in France, began to murmur that to have a more or less representative Parliament was not enough. There were such things as the Rights of Man ; there were Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Revolutionary poets clothed their dreams in ringing words ; political thinkers argued with Rousseau that man was born free ; that he was everywhere in chains was his own fault. The chains could be thrown off. There was no need for lords and classes ; all might be citizens with an equal voice in the State. One man was as good as another. If the power of the kings, the priests and the nobles was broken, then all might live happily and as brothers.

The English governing class, fearing anarchy, fearing Bonaparte, fearing, most of all, the loss of their own privileges, beat down this dream, or at any rate the public expression of it, even as they opposed and beat down at last the spreading fires in Europe. Yet it survived. It survived chiefly in the demand—apart from economic alleviations—for universal franchise, that all men and women might have an equal voice in the government of their country.

Stimulated by memories of the French Revolution, of the Chartist movement, by the utterances of Lincoln and others, the voice of democrats was raised in the Radical clubs of Victoria's reign, always for the same reforms : Extension of the franchise, abolition of the

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House of Lords, disestablishment of the Church of England.

Gradually, by successive steps and in spite of the bitter opposition of those who imagined it would mean the disruption of society, the franchise was widened. (The Peers and the Church, however, maugre the threats of a century, remain where they were.) First the middle class, then the artisans, then the manual workers (with certain exceptions), then the older women, then everybody of the age of twenty-one and over was granted the precious right to have his or her opinion asked in the affairs of government. Democracy, it has been said, means that the lout at the street corner, the typist in her tram, has as much say in foreign affairs as *you* have !

In Parliament there are two official Oppositions to the government of the day, and all persons—including Communists and Fascists—are perfectly free to advocate their political doctrines and to urge the substitution of a government of their own type provided they do not also urge that the change be carried out by violent means. A similar freedom exists in local affairs. All turns, it will be seen, upon election, upon the choosing of representatives.

These rights and liberties would appear to fulfil the requirements of democracy in theory. It is now time to see how they operate in practice.

CHAPTER II

THE MEANS OF DEMOCRACY—I

THE principal—though not the only—expression of democracy lies through government. The government of Britain is by King, Lords, and Commons acting and interacting through a Constitution which is largely unwritten, and depends upon custom and precedent. In theory the king can dismiss a Ministry at any time ; in practice he does not. It may be said that the three estates of the Realm maintain a seemingly precarious though workable and working balance.

Few would argue that an hereditary monarchy is incompatible with democracy. The Crown in this country is extremely popular and rests, beyond question, upon the will of an overwhelming majority of the people. There is a king or queen, also, at the head of other democratic countries, such as Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, and Norway. In each case, so far as common knowledge goes, the king or queen and the royal family are popular and approved, and there is no strong Republican movement against them.

A hundred years ago it would probably have been forecast by Liberals as a safe certainty that in 1939 there would be no kings left in the world. To-day it is a commonplace that the Great War, which brought down three semi-absolutist emperors, left the British Throne stronger than before. Since 1918, it is probable that in Britain and in other of the democratic States the Crown is more actively supported, *i.e.* of will rather than as a tradition, by the mass of the people than previously.

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One may suggest three reasons for this. The first is that in a world growing weary of rival ideologies and endless political argument, the conviction that it is safer and better to stick to what we have has an ever widening body of adherents. The second is the feeling, which has gathered force in recent years, that a king raised above parties and all controversy is the best safeguard against dictatorship. (He did not prove so in Italy, however.) A third reason may be that we have a greater experience of democratic politicians than the early Victorians, and that no considerable body of persons in the whole country would wish to see one of that not very popular species exalted to the rank of president in substitution for the king.

It is true that much might be done in Britain to "democratize" the Crown. It is felt by many that the king, through no fault of his own, moves in an intimate circle too exclusively aristocratic and wealthy; that the tastes and habits implanted in him from boyhood are too emphatically those of the upper class; that it would do the young princes and princesses—especially those removed from the direct line of succession—no harm to enter a profession. That members of the Royal Family should be compelled by custom to remain in communion with a particular Church, too, is hard to defend. But these disadvantages are inherent in the social system which obtains in this country and will disappear with it or not at all. The antagonism between that system and democracy will be examined in due course.

The existence of an hereditary House of Lords as the second—or, rather, the first—chamber in a democratic State is quite indefensible, and nobody attempts to defend it directly. The arguments put forward for its continuance are that it works, that it is not so hereditary as it looks because its personnel is constantly being recruited by the ennobling of persons who have served the State as generals, admirals, governors

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of provinces, politicians, soap manufacturers, brewers, and newspaper proprietors, and that in this sense it is representative because it includes men of all shades of thought and from every walk in life. There is something in these arguments. It is also true that the House of Lords, on rare occasions, shows a wisdom, a disinterestedness and a calm which contrasts it favourably with the House of Commons. Also, in the main, the speeches made there are loftier in tone, less dictated by party motives, than those in the Lower Chamber.

Nevertheless, it remains true that the House of Lords is an aristocratic institution, rooted deep in ancient baronial privilege, and, in the present age, an engine for the preservation of the power and exemptions of wealth and the defence in general of the upper class and the *status quo* in all things. It is, in short, incompatible with genuine democracy.

It is contended by the Labour and Liberal parties that the existence of the House of Lords provides what is in effect a permanent Conservative Government for this country. During a Conservative administration the Upper Chamber almost sinks out of sight. Bills sent up from the Commons are passed automatically, with the most trifling amendment. (There is an occasional exception to this rule, however.) When a Labour or Liberal Government is in office the Lords awake to life. Though they cannot kill, they can delay legislation, and delays are dangerous when—as was the case with the two Labour administrations—the life of the Government hangs by a hair.

The point is vitally important, because it supplies one answer to those who complain of the slowness and eternal compromise in democratic procedure. The truth is plain that while our statesmen and others urge us to contemplate the benefits of democracy conferred upon us by Parliament, that Parliament is not itself democratic. In other words, democracy is not being fairly worked. But, it may be answered, if the existence

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of an hereditary House of Peers is incompatible with democracy, why does not democracy abolish it? A free, healthy democracy would.

This point is even more vital than the other, for it brings us to the core of the democratic problem. The House of Lords is not abolished, is not even seriously threatened, partly because of the massed and bastioned interests which protect it, not for itself but for what it represents, partly because the people have never been asked the sole, simple, and direct question whether they wish it to remain, and partly because of the cumbrous tardiness of democratic methods of legislation in this country, a tardiness which the House of Lords, admittedly, exists to sustain and prolong. A vicious circle indeed! Parliament will spend weeks of its time over a Bill in which the country as a whole is very slightly interested, but primary matters like the constitution of the Second Chamber are seldom raised. Nor does there seem any immediate hope of the issue being fought out to a conclusion.

This is the more remarkable as the Labour Party, the official Opposition, are pledged to the abolition of the House of Lords. The peers can afford to smile. The Labour Party have first to win a working majority in the House of Commons. At the moment of writing, though political prophecies are notoriously dangerous, it seems unlikely that they will obtain such a majority at the next election. Most of the electors will probably vote against them, not because they value the continued existence of the House of Lords, but for quite other reasons comprising questions of foreign policy, a dislike and fear of Socialism, and so on.

But even if the Labour Party obtain their majority it is by no means certain that they will proceed to abolish the House of Lords. Other legislation to which they are pledged—legislation which they regard as of greater urgency and importance—will take up all their time. The peers will probably have to wait, with

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disestablishment of the Church of England, nationalization of the land, and other long-promised reforms.

For—and here comes a major democratic difficulty—the House of Lords can only be abolished or changed in its constitution with its own consent, and the sole practicable means of ensuring this is the creation by the Crown of sufficient new peers to provide a Labour majority in the upper chamber. Would the Sovereign agree to so drastic a course without demanding a new General Election on the single issue? No Labour Government with a majority of less than a hundred clear over all other parties would dare to face the possibility, and there seems little prospect of such a Government in the immediate future. A dictator, were he of the Left, would abolish the House of Lords and all hereditary titles as a single morning's work!

Thus, at the very outset, we learn the limitations upon the power and wishes of the people as expressed through the House of Commons. It may be urged—it is—that it is very necessary to impose a check upon the hasty decisions of the mass. But this, surely, is not an object of democracy.

For practical purposes there are three political Parties in the country, and all who take the least interest in government are supposed to fit into one or other of them. There is little room for independence in the Party system as arranged at Westminster—still less for “crankiness”—less now than ever before. There is no room for a man or woman who believes, for example, in the composition and foreign policy of the National Government but is also a convinced adherent of the theories of State Socialism. Conversely, there is no room in the Labour Party for one who detests and fears Socialism but is a fervent supporter of the League of Nations. His only refuge is in the Liberal Party, which, though admirable as a national expression of the middle course, is entirely ineffective in action and cannot hope to provide a Government.

The number of such instances may be multiplied. How could a man vote who was satisfied that Mr. Chamberlain's general policy was the right one yet desired a much stronger agricultural programme and a firm, trenchant drive for social reform? What is a State Socialist of the type of Mr. H. G. Wells to do if he distrusts the personnel of the Opposition front bench and regards them—in the main—as half-hearted men with doubtful motives?

The number of independent-minded electors who vote either Conservative or Labour with grave misgivings probably runs into hundreds of thousands—maybe millions, enough to sway an election. Indeed, it is argued that these doubtful ones are the people who give, as it were, the casting vote at every election and decide the destinies of the country. It is contended, further, that this is a good thing, and a state of affairs as it should be. There is, nevertheless, something essentially clumsy and unsatisfactory in the system, if it can be called one. It means that any given election or Government is but a rough approximation to the feeling of the country as a whole; it means, further, that in order to catch this floating vote items of policy of a highly controversial nature are smothered, huddled away and never presented to the people for a clear-cut non-party decision at all. The only practicable remedies would appear to be either a plebiscite on every issue of importance or a splitting-up of the main parties into groups which more nearly express the finer shades of opinion, as in France. But to form a Government of such groups lessens stability, and necessarily implies perpetual compromise—compromise different from, but possibly no better than, the Party compromises which exist at present. Eternal compromise is, alas! the price of democracy.

A third possibility presents itself. It is the alternative of the section vote. The British Institute of Public Opinion—offspring of a parent body in the United

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States—has lately been conducting miniature elections on questions of general interest, and an enterprising newspaper has published the results. The inquiries made have ranged from the appeasement policy of Mr. Chamberlain to whether the Duke and Duchess of Windsor should be allowed to reside in this country ; on which side, in the event of war between Russia and Germany, the sympathies of the nation would lie ; whether B.B.C. Sunday programmes should be gayer and less Sabbath-like. It is claimed as proved that by the cross-section methods of the Institute an exact test of public opinion can be obtained on any given topic, with a margin of inaccuracy of less than one per cent.

Here is a means by which questions of the hour could be put to the British people at any time and answered directly and without doubt. A cross-section of voters, including persons of every age, class, and Party allegiance, could be asked a question simply and without the introduction of side-issues, and if agreed, the answer could be taken as representing the nation as a whole. When the next question arose, a different section could take their place as the accepted voters. In the United States, a country of 128 million people, as few questionces as 4,500, says the Institute, will give an accurate result. For the purposes of a British national inquiry, however, the number might be extended to, say, 100,000. Assuming that six questions are put each year, all the electors in the country would be asked for their opinion on one topic or another in the course of a generation or so.

Attractive as the plan seems, there are the usual objections and difficulties. Would the electors as a whole resign their right to be consulted into the hands of a few chosen ones of their number ? Would there not be endless bickering as to whether the result of any given inquiry were really representative ?

More doubtful still—and this is a vital question—would the politicians welcome a means by which the

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people, for the first time in history, were asked a simple direct question and told to give a plain Yes or No to it? Their calling—certainly its glamour—would disappear. Little would be left them to do but register and enact the decisions of the sovereign people. Would the Conservative Party be willing to ask the people such questions as: "Are you in favour of abolition of the House of Lords? Are you in favour of all children of whatever class being compulsorily educated in primary schools? Are you in favour of officers in the Navy and Army serving first for two years in the ranks? Are you in favour of the nationalization of the land?"

Would the Labour Party care to have these questions asked: "Are you in favour of nationalization of the means of production, distribution, and exchange? Should the Trade Unions run candidates for Parliament? Should Labour Party policy depend upon the approval of the Trade Unions?"

We touch here upon the professionalism of the politicians, the vested interest in Parliament itself. Parties like their programmes to be swallowed whole; their trust in the people is a limited one. Also, under such a system of direct popular questioning, the prestige and purpose of Parliament would almost disappear.

The democratic theory of the choosing of the Commons of England is a simple and beautiful one. The citizens in any given district meet together and select the best and wisest among them to go to Westminster and help make their laws. The cream of the nation are thus gathered together as legislators. Every one is, of course, aware of the sundering difference between this theory and the practice which obtains; nevertheless, the procedure continues unimpeded and unchanged. Nor is a remedy easy to indicate. In the first place, the "wisest and the best," the most thoughtful, the most widely read, the most judicious, rarely

offer themselves for election to Parliament. There are exceptions, but not many in proportion to the whole. A very different type generally presents itself for the honour. If a Conservative, the candidate is usually a business man who has made money and who feels that with increased leisure he may devote himself to what is called public work and so proceed to a knighthood, a baronetcy, or even a peerage. If Labour, the candidate is in most cases a Trade Union official, a working man who has edged himself out of the mass and sees no reason why he should not climb still higher. Both men may be admirable of their kind and yet fall short of the ideal representative. Commonly, a constituency has to choose one of this typical pair.

A Conservative candidate has recently revealed that before selecting their standard-bearer local Conservative associations demand of those presenting themselves how much they are prepared to contribute to the association for general expenses, and to what extent they will bear the cost of an election. It is alleged further that Tory young men, however brilliant, stand little chance of selection for safe Conservative seats unless they answer these questions to the satisfaction of the association. In other words, safe Conservative seats are sold to the highest bidder, irrespective of suitability, age, political knowledge, even of past Party services. This revelation, of course, merely admits the wider public into what was barely a secret before. Everybody possessing the slightest inside information on the working of the political machine has known for years that safe Conservative seats are sold for money, and that only young men of the very highest connections—by marriage or otherwise—can hope for such seats if they have no income other than their earnings.

But the Labour Party is not wholly guiltless on a similar count. It cannot be denied that money

sometimes plays a part in the selection of Labour candidates. Nor is it unnatural that this should be so. Elections cannot be fought without cash, and ample means are an extremely valuable asset in a candidate, more useful, probably, than a good platform manner or a wide knowledge of economic and social issues. Moreover, just as influential family connections will often secure nomination for a Conservative offering himself for a county seat, so Trade Union endorsement will generally achieve a similar result for a Labour man in an industrial area. The reason for this is twofold: Trade Union candidates are safe men, and will pull all the voters in their Union; further, there is always a sufficiency of money behind them. It is commonly known that a large proportion of good Labour seats are regarded as the corporate property of various Trade Unions. This is particularly true of the Miners' Federation. The system is not distinctly harmful or vicious, but it certainly restricts the choice of the electorate, and tends to stereotype the Labour M.P.

We will suppose an election declared in an urban constituency and the two candidates chosen by their respective associations. One is a Conservative business man, owning, probably, a country seat in a pleasant part of the country miles away from the area he seeks to represent, and equipped with the prejudices, the general ignorance, the half-suppressed irritations of his type. Against him is a Trade Union official whose prejudices, general ignorance and irritations are different in variety but not in kind from those of his opponent. The electors must choose between these two, unless there is also a Liberal in the field. But a vote for the Liberal, practically speaking, is the most unsatisfactory of all votes. In nine cases out of ten it cannot possibly elect the candidate; if it does, the Liberals cannot possibly form a Government, while the Party as a whole is divided between those who

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support the National Cabinet, still calling themselves Liberals, and those who oppose it.

For the purposes of this test election, let us suppose it to be a straight fight between Conservative and Labour. It is probable, though by no means invariably the case, that neither knows a great deal about politics, either in root principle or in intricate detail. The one may have a wide acquaintance with Trade Union procedure and the other an intimate knowledge of tea brokerage, advertising, or coal factoring. Each will be aware of the main plank in his Party's platform, either that Mr. Chamberlain has saved peace or that Mr. Chamberlain has betrayed democracy, or whatever it may be. For the rest, both will be prompted by their agents and by the Party literature poured out from the central offices in London; both, in short, will have to "mug up" their case. Nor dare either of them, even if he could, present that case with intelligence and originality. The best candidate from the Party point of view sticks to the grooves; he is a tram, not even a trolley-bus. A personal touch, an apposite illustration, a spice of wit or sarcasm, may be returned with deadly effect by the other side. The big guns can afford an occasional flight of fancy, be allowed to coin a phrase if it is not too difficult for the many; the little men must content themselves with repeating what their betters have said.

Nor will either candidate have any excuse for not knowing what his Party policy is on any given point. He will be supplied with literature covering every detail of home and foreign affairs, with Party decisions upon them in leaded type, and quotations from his leaders' speeches on each subject. With regard to local matters—on which it is possible that he is totally ignorant—he will be prompted by his agent. In many cases, of course, he will be advised to give no definite answer at all.

Questionnaires will pour into each headquarters.

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The candidates will be asked what is their attitude to local option, vivisection, divorce law reform, prison reform, the League of Nations, licensing hours, religious teaching in schools, sex teaching in schools, Sunday games in the parks, birth-control clinics, the catching of rabbits in traps, and what not. Normally, the candidate will answer none of these questions without consulting his agent. He is a dummy in such matters. Party policy must first be considered; if there is none, then local prejudices must be weighed and balanced. It may be, for example, that one or other of the candidates has recently been greatly annoyed because, his train having arrived a few minutes late at a terminus, he was unable to buy himself a glass of whisky at the station buffet. He may in his wrath have cursed the licensing restrictions which Parliament has ordained. He would not dare say so, however, in answer to a questionnaire or on the public platform. He would not dare admit that he drinks whisky at all for fear of losing the teetotal vote.

For there are all sorts of votes to be considered. There is the Catholic vote, the women's vote, the shop-assistants' vote, the Nonconformist vote, the Trade Union vote, the spinsters' vote, and the old-age-pensioners' vote. A good candidate must proceed as though each individual vote is of primary importance; he must offend none, his private opinions and prejudices must appear as little as may be. It is not only a question of kissing babies; he must strive to make of himself a mere Party unit. Democratic election gives scope for almost unlimited humbug. The people guess it and despise most politicians accordingly.

Even a candidate's past utterances may rise up—or be resurrected—to injure him. A few years ago a man of some eminence was chosen as prospective candidate by the local Labour Party in an urban constituency. He proceeded to "nurse" the district; he was a good speaker, the association no doubt congratulated them-

selves on having got him. Suddenly the sitting member died ; a by-election became imminent. All was set, when a whisper reached Party headquarters. It appeared that the candidate had once written a book, which made no great stir, in which he had referred with implied approval, or at least without marked disapproval, of sexual conduct not in accordance with the accepted code. One of the Party leaders went down to the constituency and persuaded the association, even at the eleventh hour, to withdraw the candidature of the imprudent author and substitute that of another person who had not been so unwise. Nor was the leader wrong from the Party point of view. Probably he cared nothing whatever for the former candidate's views on sexual ethics ; neither did the members of the local association. But he knew, and all knew, that the unorthodox opinion, uttered years before, would be dragged out of its context and used against the Labour nominee by his opponents ; that he would be represented as an advocate of immorality, perhaps by inference in leaflets quoting his words, certainly by means of a whispering campaign. Yet the opinion so incautiously put into print was one not uncommonly held by men of the world and could be uttered in private conversation—even in mixed company—without any one turning a hair. It must be added in fairness that had it been the Conservative candidate who had written the book the local Labour Party would almost certainly have used the quotation against him in precisely the same way, with the same glee and to the same end. Such are the insincerities of Party politics, and such their stifling effect upon opinion.

Elections on a higher grade of intelligence and reality than the one sketched here are infrequent. It occasionally happens that two men, not leaders, of equal sincerity and mental power are matched against each other. Then, sometimes, in spite of the inevitable

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stereotyping of parliamentary contests there is a fight worth following. It is the average election, however, which must be viewed as a fair sample of democratic self-government in action, and the sight is scarcely an inspiring one. It may, perhaps, truthfully be said that a person of even moderate intelligence—though he or she may be intensely concerned as to the quality and colour of the Government in power—tends to regard the mechanics of parliamentary hustings with faint derision. The whole thing is so palpably worked up, so full of exaggeration which is not even skilful, so tinged with the shameless falsehood of modern propaganda and advertisement, that it is difficult to keep in mind the serious purpose which lies behind the shouting and the antics. Loud-speakers are used to bray at the electors in the streets and warm their tepid attention into life, and these seem typical and well-suited to the occasion. The voter of sense and discrimination listens and most probably tells himself that truth lies between, but this does not help him; he must support either one group or the other, subscribe to one of the two catch-phrases yelled at him. He may believe—he very likely does—that the Conservative Party exists primarily to uphold the privileges and rights of property and to offer unfaltering opposition to every kind of reform; he may equally believe that the Labour Party glibly promises a sweeping social change, the implications of which it has never clearly faced and to implement which it is totally unprepared. His beliefs may be complicated by one or more of many side-opinions. He must throw in his lot with one of the two or disfranchise himself.

Candidates themselves are sometimes oppressed by the shoddy nature of their task. They soon find that politics are a business as well as a dream. The speech which sounded so well on the opening night of the campaign wears pitifully thin and threadbare at the end of a fortnight, when it has probably been made

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some fifty times. Essentially, there is only one speech to be made, and its repetition is inevitable. But this is not all. An eye must be kept on finance, on the law of elections, and the law of libel; quarrels between supporters—which are not infrequent—must somehow be adjusted, paid work must be distributed fairly among Party hangers-on in such a way as to cause a minimum of friction and jealousy. A good agent may relieve the candidate of much of this burden, but not all. Occasionally it happens that a speech by a leader in the midst of a campaign throws the ranks into confusion. The candidate must say something to explain it. Whatever he says is certain to annoy and disgust a section of the Party. They will accuse him of throwing the election away; of letting them down. His own personal, private, honest opinion—which may well be that the leader is a fool and a muddler—is the last thing which is wanted. He must trim, skate, be adroit in saying nothing too definite. Perhaps he came into politics with shining ideals; they will be a little tarnished now.

One of the two must be elected. Let us suppose it to be the Labour candidate. It is likely that a feeling of elation will succeed his exhaustion and depression when he finds himself the chosen of his fellow-citizens, a veritable Member of Parliament. How long this feeling remains with him depends upon his civic sensitivity and conscientiousness.

For the fact that the House of Commons can be, and often is, disillusionizing is known to many. Its general impact upon the eager mind is that of a vast and antiquated machine, cumbrous and slow, fairly comic in many of its secondary contrivances, and with a pitiful trickle of achievement. It might, one supposes, be rebuilt and modernized; human ingenuity should be equal to such a task. But, it is asserted, to do so is outside the scope of practical politics. So the patched and wheezing thing lumbers on, and the most

that can be done is to get the best out of it that it will give.

It is, perhaps, British and characteristic that the House of Commons is incapable of accommodating all its six hundred and fifteen members at any one time. Similarly, the House of Lords cannot hold all its peers, but as few of them ever attend this is less important. When a big debate occurs in the Commons its members overflow into the galleries, sit in the gangways, anywhere they can get. The Chamber was built, too, on the Whig and Tory principle, *i.e.* oblong and with opposite rows of seats on the assumption that there would be two parties of approximately equal numbers for ever. This is gravely inconvenient. Private members who wish to secure for themselves a good seat for the session have to arrive in the small hours of the first day and wait outside the chamber in a sort of queue. No allowance whatever is made for groups. For a considerable period members of the Independent Labour Party, then the extreme Left wing of the House, occupied the same bench as Colonel Gretton and Sir Henry Page Croft, who were generally considered to constitute the extreme Right wing. The antique customs of the House—such as the rule that a member wishing to raise a point of order once a division has been called must put on his hat—are quaint but unimportant. What is vital is the quality and effect of the debates which proceed there, and it is upon these that the new member would naturally concentrate his attention.

Professor Harold J. Laski, in his important book, *Parliamentary Government in England*, makes a surprising and unusual defence of the debates in the House of Commons.

"It has become," he writes, "almost the proof of political sophistication to sneer at the House. The 'talking-shop' leads many people to sigh like Carlyle for Colonel Pride and his little platoon. On all this,

there are many things to be said : not least of them that the alternative to the ' talking-shop ' is the concentration camp. A society that is able to discuss does not need to fight, and the greater the capacity to maintain interest in discussion the less danger there is of an inability to effect the compromises that maintain social peace.

" Any one who turns over the Hansard of sixty or seventy years ago will find all save the supreme historic speeches unreadable ; it is only now and again that he can catch the historic voices coming through, a little faint, perhaps, with the years. He will find the same verbosity, the same repetition, the same domination of leaders. The House empties when Mr. Gladstone has replied just as it emptied when Mr. Baldwin sat down. Speeches no more altered opinion in the House a generation or two generations ago than they alter opinions to-day. It is tempting, even, to argue that not even the critic of parliamentarism expects that they should. There is no more reason to suppose that they will than there is to expect that a multitude of sermons will produce a community of Christians. The process of debate is not an effort in sudden conversion ; and those who attack the House because its speeches seem to reach but a little way are in fact guilty of one of the simplest of intellectualist fallacies."

It is nevertheless true that a principal count against government by parliamentary democracy is the endless, repetitive, and profitless discussions which drag on night after night during the session. Every argument on either side is used over and over again, often in speeches of intolerable prolixity, and always without the slightest apparent result. Nobody who has not attended the debates over a period of time can have a true idea of their dreariness. New members become listless and angry ; old members grow hardened and escape from the Chamber as soon and as often as they can. At least three-quarters of the speeches are made

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to a House less than a quarter full, often to a mere handful of members. Is there no remedy for this? Are these dull, prolonged debates, in which members are really talking to nobody but themselves and the Press Gallery, inherent in the democratic system? These questions must be examined.

In the first place, there is no reason whatever why speeches should not be limited to ten minutes each. Any competent debater should be able to say all he needs to say in ten minutes, especially if, as is nearly always the case, the arguments for and against have been exhausted by previous speakers. Exceptions could be made; Privy Councillors might be allowed a quarter of an hour, Ministers initiating a debate or Opposition front benchmen replying half an hour. The plan would teach members to be terse, prevent the utterance of a vast deal of windy nonsense, and allow more members to speak in any debate. In the long run, too, it would save parliamentary time and enable more work to be got through in the course of a session.

I have said that there is no reason why a ten-minute rule should not be applied to all debates: there is one, the vanity of Members of Parliament. They cannot bear to think their utterances are unimportant and could with advantage be ruthlessly pruned. It is noteworthy that the less original matter a member has to offer, the longer, as a rule, he takes to offer it. The suggestion of a ten-minute rule or even a five-minute rule has been made again and again in the House, but never enforced. The Speaker, from time to time, implores members to keep their speeches shorter, but in the main they do not respond, even to a slight degree. A few individuals impose a self-denying ordinance upon themselves and limit their speeches to a few minutes; the rest continue as before. A thousand words can be spoken with comfortable ease in ten minutes; it is enough for all speeches save one in a hundred, and though the point may not seem of the

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first importance, M.P.'s would, beyond any doubt, be serving the interests of democracy by denying themselves the luxury of more.

What is said and gained in debates is naturally of even more importance than their length, and here again democratic parliamentary government has to face a charge of futility and inconclusiveness. The charge is well-based. It is not so much that nobody is ever converted by the arguments of the other side as that, too often, nothing is clarified, settled, tidied and put away.

Typical recent instances have been the debates on the Spanish civil war occurring at intervals during the past two years. To the logical, forthright mind these debates were irritating in the extreme. They differed little one from another. The Labour Party urged, in speeches of increasing heat and bitterness, that what they described as the lawfully elected Government of Spain should be allowed to buy arms in the open market, as is done by any other government. They pointed out that the non-intervention policy supported by the British Government operated only against the Republicans in Spain, that Italy and Germany were openly and admittedly intervening, and to great effect.

To these arguments the Prime Minister and other Government speakers invariably replied that non-intervention had probably preserved peace in Europe; that for the British Government to take sides—but who suggested that it should?—would have been likely to precipitate war; that they, for their part, were determined to keep out of the quarrel, which was essentially not a British concern. The debates ended with the usual division, in which the Labour Party was heavily defeated, and things went on precisely as before.

It needs no emphasis to underline the unsatisfactory, indeed, the exasperating nature of these debates. All turned upon the hypothesis that if the British Govern-

ment raised its ban on the export of arms to Republican Spain, Italy—assisted by Germany—would forthwith declare war on Great Britain, or, at least, that a situation involving war might arise. Obviously the Labour Party could not prove that it wouldn't; equally obviously the Government could not prove that it would. It was a matter of opinion, which may or may not have been honestly held. The Labour men accused Conservatives of favouring Fascism; the Conservatives retorted by describing their opponents as war-mongers. The respective arguments, which are here reduced to their barest minimum, were used again and again and again; none were conclusively answered, and nobody was convinced. A bewildered democrat may well ask himself what was the hidden truth behind the confused and pointless scuffle of words. Did the Government genuinely believe, on secret information received, that if they raised the ban Mussolini might make war, or were they privately hoping that General Franco might win, and determined to assist him to the limit of their power? Or, again, were they just stupidly blind to the possible consequences to the British Empire of a Fascist victory in Spain? Such, at least, was the view of Mr. Lloyd George.

The problem of home unemployment reflects far more discredit upon the House of Commons—and, in particular, upon its debates—than the war in Spain. This matter, indeed, is a growing scandal in the State and a stumbling-block to all advocates of democracy.

At intervals of approximately two months the Opposition stages what is called a full-dress debate on the subject of the unemployed, their numbers, their treatment, and the fact that nothing is done to find them work. This is usually achieved by the method of putting down a motion of censure upon the Government. The motion is discussed from about four o'clock to eleven. The same things are said on every occasion. Labour speakers point out the deterioration which

corrodes a man's mind and habits after a long period of enforced idleness, and mention cases in which men have been out of work for years, others of youths who have left school, grown up and married without ever being employed. Pictures are drawn with eloquence of the derelict areas, of the hopelessness, the poverty, the slow loss of self-respect. Cases of hardship through the operation of the means test are told ; sometimes an Opposition member will hint darkly that the unemployed as a body will not stand much more, that they will take matters into their own hands and force the Government to action. This threat has been made for years, and Conservative members smile when they hear it. The only remedy, it is stated, is Socialism.

Replies are made from the other side of the House. Things, it is said, are not so bad as they appear. Government measures are beginning to take effect. New factories are being opened in the London area which will absorb hundreds of men. Praise is given to the occupation centres, to the Land Settlement Association, which takes unemployed men and trains them for work in agriculture, and so on. There are signs, it is said, that trade is improving ; figures are quoted to prove that the worst of the " recession " has passed.

Last, the Minister of Labour gets up to answer his critics. They, and the reporters in the Gallery, know perfectly well what he will say before he says it. If there has been an increase in the number of unemployed he usually explains it by saying that the count was taken upon a wet day, or that there is always a falling-off in trade just after Christmas. He is generally in a position to point out that while the unemployed have increased, the numbers of those in insured work have gone up since the previous year. (This, of course, is due to the natural increase in the population.) Socialist remedies, he is careful to state, would be worse than the disease. He details the Government plans,

which to describe as tinkering is to praise them, and mentions how a pit has been reopened here, a new ship is being built there, and a factory in a third area has taken on more hands. Then the bell rings, there is a division, and the Labour motion is handsomely defeated.

It would be honest and straightforward in the Minister of Labour—whoever he may be—if he admitted that he has no remedy for unemployment, that the evil is inherent in an industrial state, that as a problem it is completely beyond his solving. But no politician dare make such an admission. It would be too dangerous ; the confession would be quoted against the Government on every Opposition platform in the country. So he has to keep up a sickening pretence of optimism and bustle, of doing this, that, and the other thing, of “watching the situation closely.” It is a sorry piece of play-acting, it deceives nobody, makes the judicious grieve, disgusts many with democracy and the process of democratic government.

There are two distinct matters here. The first is what can only be called the humbug of House of Commons technique. The other is the question : Is there truly no remedy for unemployment other than Socialism? Large numbers of well-informed persons believe that there is ; that given the heart and the will, the initiative and the energy plus the necessary expenditure, the problem can be solved without the nationalization of the means of production. Mr. Lloyd George is one of them, Mr. J. B. Priestley another, Lord Beaverbrook a third. The opinion of none of these men is despicable. The Press—and not only the newspapers of the Left—gird continually at the Government, urging, appealing, jeering, spending their money on inquiries, in drawing up schemes of their own which they beg the Government to adopt. The National Government, like a narcotized sultan on a divan, sits and stares and does nothing, nothing at all. No

appeals, no eloquence, no gibes or threats can stir it into action.

The unemployment figures recently rose above the two million mark, though they have since fallen again. Rearmament has failed substantially to reduce them; tariffs have failed. What next? The *Daily Herald* has lately surveyed the derelict areas and drawn up concrete schemes for industry which, it is claimed, would bring many thousands back to work. If these schemes are unsound why do not Government spokesmen expose them and produce better schemes of their own? Mr. J. B. Priestley, writing early in 1939, said this: "There is, to my mind, nothing to be said in favour of the dole system, except as a temporary measure. The American system of relief work, cost what it may, is far better. Even Hitler and Goering can show us something better than what we have got, and while we have these grey ghosts of men in these dark, silent towns, we are in this one respect beneath the level of the dictatorships."

Lastly, here is a leader which appeared in the *Sunday Express*, a Conservative newspaper, on 8th January 1939. It is quoted almost entire.

"Now comes the news that in the last twelve months one hundred and sixty-five thousand new recruits have joined our Grey Army and swelled the ranks of the battalions of the unemployed. 'Something will be done.' Do you remember those words? But nothing has been done. We have had a surfeit of promises from the politicians on this issue, but we still hunger for any measure of performance. The problem of unemployment cuts at the very heart of the people. The right to work is a sacred duty that the Government should confer upon the citizens. If the Government does not do so, it is a failure and must be written down as one. The fact that such a Government succeeds in foreign policy does not justify continued support of its failure in domestic policy.

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"Long ago Mr. J. H. Thomas set the style. Continually he told us that the hard core of unemployment had been broken. Constantly, while he did so, the figures rose. Mr. Thomas is now out of a job himself. But his latter-day successor at the Ministry of Labour, Mr. Ernest Brown, has inherited the Thomas technique.

"Are we then to accept the problem as insoluble? Such a proposition is intolerable. The problem can be solved. It must be solved. For our two million unemployed represent a tremendous national asset which we cannot afford to waste. Our Grey Army contains a store of muscle-power and brain-power which we need. Above all, the unemployed offer a huge potential market for British goods. For give the men on the dole a chance to earn and they will buy the things they need. Their money will pass back over the counters of the shops, bringing increased orders to the factories and prosperity to us all.

"How then can we set our unemployed to work?

"In modern times Germany and Russia have solved their unemployment problems. The Germans have done it by conscripting their workers and supplying them with food, shelter, and nominal wages in return for the public work they perform. The Russians have conscripted their workers too. And they have turned them out to plough and equip the undeveloped regions of the Soviet Union. In Britain we have no need of industrial conscription. But we have something to learn from Russia all the same. For our own country is only half developed. Great tracts of land lie idle. Millions of our men and women live in houses fit for beasts. Thousands of our homes lack any water supply. Our roads are narrow. So much to do, two million idle men to do it. And plenty of idle capital in the banks.

"One thing, one thing alone, prevents the men and the money from being brought together. It is the complacency of the British public and their indifference

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to the situation. No resolute action can be looked for from the Government until it is demanded with a prolonged and increasing uproar by the citizens. Only when that uproar arises will an opportunity be given to the soldiers in our Grey Army to earn this day their daily bread."

By something stronger than coincidence, rather an indication of the common alarm and indignation of all patriotic, compassionate, and sensible men, a leader on exactly similar lines appeared in the *Observer*—another Conservative newspaper—six weeks later. It is couched in rather more stately language; its moral is the same. This, also, is quoted in full.

"It is difficult to read debates on unemployment without irritation at their defects of spirit and outlook. The matter is far too grave for political axe-grinding. Those who claim the title of statesmen should be above suggesting either that their record is unblemished or that their panaceas are infallible. The misfortunes of the community ought to bring parties together instead of sharpening their differences. And what we are here concerned with is a widespread blight upon happiness and moral health. The consequences deepen with every day that it remains unchecked.

"It is the outstanding failure of our methods that, after years of experience, we should still be almost helpless watchers of the spectacle of workless millions. True, we feed them; but merely to preserve lives, leaving the great majority without any programme or sense of purpose, is to let the more difficult problem go untouched. To the better type of unemployed their state is a humiliation. To the weaker and less sensitive it is a begetter of moral indifference, whose toils are made ever stronger by time. For those who leave school to claim a meagre subsistence from the State without any return service, it is almost a sentence to the lowering or extinction of every manly quality. No

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instinct of energy, of self-respect, or of social duty gets a chance to develop in such conditions. The wonder is that there should be any resistance to degeneration.

"That worst and most accusing aspect of unemployment should quench all political antipathies in a common sense of shame. Here neglect amounts to a national crime, for there is nothing more heinous than to connive at the corruption of youth, and that is the practical effect of our lack of policy. To put these thousands of young derelicts in training, to enforce the education of their active powers, and to save them from sinking into contented parasites, is as obvious an imperative as the conscience of any people could enforce.

"But the whole situation is one that democracy can evade only to its own condemnation. There is hardly a greater satire in the history of human government than this of a great nation which has many things waiting to be done, millions of people asking for work and abundance of capital, but prefers to pay the workless to stand idle and deteriorate. To resign ourselves to such a combination of moral waste and material waste would be to admit, in essence, that we had ceased to be capable of regulating our own destiny. It is useless to plead that there are some forces too formidable for human control. So it may be, but this is not one of them. The dictatorships, as every one knows, have got rid of the reproach of workless masses of mankind. The distinctive methods by which they have done so involve a general harshness from which we recoil, but if democracy has the virtues claimed for it, an equal efficiency need not be accompanied by the same ruthlessness.

"If popular self-government cannot evolve a constructive power sufficient to put willing workers to waiting work and to heal the canker of an enforced parasitism, its reputation as a political system must be rapidly on the wane. We may have to overhaul our

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financial philosophy to uproot this scandal. The needs of national defence are driving us to accept a new setting for the common life. It will certainly require us to discard old shibboleths and to move upon fresh lines of thought if we are to expel the evils that economic pedantry has engendered in the body social. 'Youth on the dole' is a parasitic debasement. The evil must cease and the work must be found."

What is the matter with our State that two great newspapers, both firm supporters of democracy, of the existing order and of the very Government in power, should be driven to use such phrases as these? Where is the failure? What is the prime cause of this filmy-eyed inertia, this crass indifference? Democracy means that the will of the people shall prevail. Can it be that the will of the people of Britain, under democracy, is not strong enough, not imaginative and kindly enough, to solve the unemployment problem?

CHAPTER III

THE MEANS OF DEMOCRACY—II

IN considering the methods and achievements of democracy it is fair and reasonable to take them over a period of years and not to confine examination to current events.

The era since the close of the Great War has been, or should have been, an ideal testing-time for democracy. Adult suffrage—long dreamed of and hoped for by Victorian reformers—has come into practice. Every citizen of the nation, man or woman, of twenty-one or over, is now, in theory, consulted on Government policy, every one is jointly responsible for Britain's victories in peace or war, and equally for her errors and disasters. The Reign of Reason at last!

The politicians speak for the people and act in their name. What have been the principal acts of the politicians since 1918? They attempted to defeat and overthrow the Bolshevist Government of Russia and failed. They tried to make Germany pay the whole cost of the war, demanding a ludicrously impossible sum as reparations. They failed to obtain it and merely stimulated the resurgence of an angry and embittered German people, who turned away from democracy to dictatorship to regain their rights. They tried to crush an armed rising by the Irish people for national independence and failed. After squabbling among themselves for more than a generation over the alleged benefit of tariffs, they applied tariffs as a cure for unemployment. Again they have failed.

They tried to secure genuine non-intervention in the

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Spanish civil war and failed ; tried to persuade the other nations of the earth to disarm and failed ; tried to check the dictators and prevent the ever-growing menace of their success and failed ; tried, presumably, to keep their promises of enlarged social reform and a better life for all and failed.

Have there been no successes ? They forced, with singular unanimity and resolution, the abdication of a king who wished to marry a divorced woman.

It is hard to find a definite satisfactory achievement by the politicians in any other sphere. Social reform since the war has been negligible. Mr. Churchill's measure conferring pensions on widows is the one outstanding Act of this kind. Since 1914 more than two million acres of land have gone out of cultivation, and the number of British cargo vessels has fallen by over two thousand. We no longer sweep the seas ; we grow less and less of our own food ; the lessons of the last war have clearly not been learnt by our political leaders.

But the two cases of Ireland and of tariffs exhibit the politicians in all their fatuity and folly. The history of the Irish question, as it used to be called, is well known. For many years a clear majority of the Irish people demanded in a perfectly constitutional way the restoration of an Irish Parliament in Dublin. No convincing reason was ever apparent why the demand should not be granted. Mr. Gladstone became converted to the proposition and brought in a Bill to give it effect. A section of his cabinet, however, led by Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, dissented, broke away from Mr. Gladstone and formed a Party of their own. The most probable reason for Mr. Chamberlain's action was pique and general irritation with his chief.

For thirty years the political battle for Home Rule raged and swayed. The Liberals were pledged to give it ; the Conservatives pledged to prevent them. The attention of the whole of the British people was suc-

cessfully diverted from their own problems and injustices to the totally unimportant question—to them—whether Ireland should have its own parliament. It has been suggested that such diversion was the deliberate policy of the Conservative Party, but sheer stupidity is a much more likely explanation. Its members prophesied ruin to Britain if the Irish demand were granted; the province of Ulster was encouraged to threaten armed resistance.

When the Liberal Government of 1906, after much delay, brought in their own Bill, the objections of Ulster were again deliberately inflamed by the Conservatives. Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem in which the lines occurred :

“We know the hells prepared,
For such as serve not Rome.”

Led by Sir Edward Carson, a bitter-minded, intransigent lawyer who afterwards became—of all things!—a Law Lord, and by Mr. F. E. Smith, an aspiring, unscrupulous politician who afterwards became Lord Chancellor, preparations were made for rebellion in Ulster should the Bill be passed into law and implemented. The outbreak of the Great War alone prevented the coming of a civil war about nothing of consequence, a civil war fomented by the politicians entirely for their own ends.

Insurrection broke out in Dublin in 1916 and was suppressed with much bloodshed. Soon after the Great War ended the people of Southern Ireland, naturally despairing of parliamentary action, declared themselves a Republic, and began a remorseless, determined, and very skilful guerrilla war against the British garrison, which continued for over two years. There were ambushes, shootings, and reprisals, and much violence, slaughter, and bitterness on both sides. Britain was held up to the world as a bully forcing its dominion upon a smaller and weaker nation. At length the

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English politicians were obliged to give way and to grant a far greater measure of self-government to Ireland than was originally demanded. They had failed again ; failed to conciliate, failed to subdue.

One of those who signed the Treaty for Britain was Mr. F. E. Smith, by then Lord Birkenhead. Ulster, it is true, was excluded from the scope of the Treaty and was left to be a thorn in the side of the new Irish nation and to prevent the trust and friendship which might have developed between the two lands. The Ulster objections to Home Rule had been so worked up and flattered by the Conservative Party for political ends, *i.e.* to embarrass the Liberals, that it is impossible to say how far the sentiment was genuine and how far trumpery. There can be little doubt that wise statesmanship would have solved the problem and saved the partition of Ireland. In general, nobody in this country has been a penny the worse because an Irish Parliament meets in Dublin, and the threatened ruin has not come.

Contemporaneously with the controversy about Home Rule for Ireland was that about Protection for Britain. It was not called Protection by its advocates, however, but Tariff Reform. In this case it was the Liberals who urged that ruin would inevitably follow any departure from Free Trade principles, while the Conservatives—most of them—pleaded for change. Those now in middle age will remember the fury of this fight, which began with the conversion of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain to tariffs in 1903. It is noteworthy that this politician, now generally regarded as a great man, split the Liberal Party over Home Rule and the Conservative Party over tariffs, and was essentially wrong both times.

Speeches, described as momentous, brilliant and crushing, were made on each side for a period of nearly thirty years, and ended only with the passing by the National Government of the Import Duties Act in

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1932. (A considerable body of Liberals, who had previously denounced all tariffs as useless and dangerous, voted for the measure.) The arguments used during the long controversy were simple, and repeated to weariness. The Conservatives urged that if foreign manufactured goods were taxed by means of protective duties more would be made in this country, thus providing work for our own people, and at the same time swelling the revenue by means of the duties imposed.

The Liberals, with loud derision, answered that if you kept the goods out you wouldn't get a revenue, and if you got a revenue you wouldn't have kept the goods out. They argued further that the competition of foreign goods kept down home prices, that our export trade would suffer from the retaliatory measures adopted by foreign countries if we imposed tariffs, that our imported food was paid for by means of these exports, and that consequently if we failed to sell them we should starve, that Free Trade had made us the greatest commercial country and the richest in the world, and that to abandon it was madness, no less.

There was much talk of "dumping," chiefly by Germany, and bitterness was aroused against all foreigners, who were generally represented by Conservative cartoonists as fat men laughing at the stupidity of the British. Class acrimony was brought into the controversy by the suggestion, sedulously fostered by some Liberals and Labour men, that the real Conservative aim was to raise revenue by "taxing the people's food" instead of taxing the rich.

Even in those pre-war days there was much unemployment, and it was confidently stated by Conservative speakers that tariffs would end this out of hand. Indeed, the slogan or catchword of the Tariff Reform League, founded to propagate the principles lately adopted by Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, was "Tariff Reform means work for all."

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It is now possible to examine these arguments and counter-arguments in the light of the event. Since 1932 Britain has been a Protectionist country. Tariffs have not cured unemployment ; so far as can be judged they have made no appreciable difference to the problem. On the other hand they have not ruined our trade ; the calamities foreseen by Free Traders have not occurred. Tariffs have, however, produced a substantial revenue. It amounted last year to nearly thirty million pounds, and it is certain that no Government—not even a Liberal Government, were one possible—would take the protective duties off for the simple reason that the money would have to be found in some other—perhaps more unpopular—way. Both sides, therefore, in this long-drawn-out and embittered dispute were fundamentally wrong. What reason is there for supposing they may be right in their present contentions ? Fortunately for politicians, the public memory is incredibly short.

What, it may be asked, of the politicians themselves, the men who have been responsible for these errors and futilities in the past, and may be equally mistaken in what they proclaim with confidence to-day ? They are human and fallible, it is urged ; they are the creatures of events, they do not make them. But this may equally be said of the dictators. The important question is : Does a democratic State, of its nature, throw up as leaders its best and most politically-able citizens ? Or, in other words, does Britain get the best men to govern it ?

To discuss the matter at all frankly names must be mentioned, and that is to lay oneself open to a charge of bias. To speak, for instance, of Earl Baldwin without praise is to seem to partisans to oppose Conservative ideas. To say that a British political misfortune of recent years has been the weakness of the Labour Party, that is to say, the official Opposition, may appear to some needlessly to belittle the Labour Party.

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The author of this book disclaims any such intention. He is a member of no political party, and is much more concerned with the fortunes of the English people than with those of any group or faction.

It is significant that politicians as a class are not popular. Any joke made against them on the stage brings an instant response, the laughter of relish. But, it is fair to remember, the same is true of doctors, lawyers, plumbers, bishops, mothers-in-law, even wives. The explanation may be that there is some psychological reaction here, some hidden resentment lurking in the minds of men against those to whom they are obliged, at different times, to commit their affairs. Nevertheless, the complacent airs which successful politicians give themselves, the deference with which their—for the most part—platitudinous utterances are treated, the glory and power which fall to the chief politician of all, the Prime Minister, are probably deeply irksome to the man in the street no less than to the intelligent.

For what, he asks himself, are the principal requirements in the trade of politics, the natural powers which enable a man to rise therein? Generally the answer would be: a good voice, a confident manner and a commonplace mind. There is undoubtedly some exaggeration here, but basically the statement is true. Without these three qualities a man can scarcely hope to push his way to the front in a profession which depends so much on the showier and more superficial endowments. There may be administrative ability as well, or legal skill, or great eloquence, but it cannot be said that these are necessary: the late Ramsay MacDonald rose to the highest post in the State without the aid of any of them. When to this is added the consistent failure of democratic politicians to achieve, to foresee, to prevent, to redeem the very promises by which they live; when their perpetual excuses are taken into the account; when to the mass of the

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people, unemployed, under-employed or underpaid, it goes on being the same old difficult world in spite of all their perorations, there can be small wonder that the average elector regards politicians in the main with a distrust closely bordering upon contempt.

Roundly speaking, there is never a reform, a cause, an adventure, even a step which the politicians undertake of their own volition. Almost invariably they have to be forced into it by public outcry, Press clamour, or both. Peace with Ireland, rearmament, air raid precautions on an adequate scale are all cases in point. The belated appointment in January 1939 of a practical farmer—a new man to the Cabinet—as Minister of Agriculture with wide powers to try to save British farming from sliding into ruin was almost entirely due to the relentless campaign of the *Daily Express* and its effect upon the farmers. Conservative M.P.'s began to tremble for their rural seats ; there is really no way to get our politicians to move except by threatening them.

It may be argued here that this is a fault of democracy itself ; that it is a part of the system ; that vague promises of a better life for all are expected of politicians, and that nobody dreams they will attempt literally to fulfil them. It may be urged further that political leaders cannot move ahead of public opinion, that to wait for public pressure is correct in them. No candidate, it may be said, would ever be elected who made a speech of this kind : " I make you no promises and I tell you no lies. I will do my best, but I cannot guarantee anything. If you are no worse off at the next election than you are now I shall consider I have done pretty well. As for the past, forget it ! I have done mistakes and miscalculations but you would probably have done the same in my place. You must trust me, that's all. If you don't want to do that, go and vote for my opponent."

Such a speech would be refreshing and might be

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effective. It is more than probable, however, that an audience of human electors would prefer, on reflection, to support a candidate more cocksure and therefore more inspiring in his confidence, full of glib reasons for past errors and missed opportunities, and ready with the usual peroration about Britain breasting the slope and going ever on and upward to the dawn, or some such. Speeches of this kind impart a warm glow of optimism, as the dictators very well know.

Professor Laski defends Cabinet Ministers in a passage full of power and cogency. "To reach the Cabinet at all," he says, "they will have had to display, as a general rule, certain qualities of character, common sense, judgment, the ability to make a case, the power to meet an emergency, which are at least the basis upon which the successful administration is built. If it is said that, as compared with the civil servants they will control, they are amateurs, there are at least two answers. It is, firstly, highly undesirable for a Cabinet Minister to be a specialist in the work of his department; he then runs the danger that is common to all specialists of sacrificing width of view to intensity of gaze. And secondly, his business as a Cabinet Minister is not the manipulation of detail but the definition of a general direction. He seeks to co-ordinate the work of his department, on the one hand, and to assist in the Cabinet itself in co-ordinating the work of the departments as a whole into a coherent line of policy. The politician at his best is quite invariably better at this work than any specialist; his training in persuading public opinion makes him so."

Yes; but this presupposes that Cabinet Ministers are all of a fine type; sagacious men of ability and principle, with a lifetime of public service behind them. Such a view does not fit the known facts. Cabinet Ministers are made for a variety of reasons—to satisfy a section of the Party, as a reward for devilling of one sort or another, because of a strong family pull

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or of personal friendship on the part of the Prime Minister. It not infrequently happens that a Cabinet Minister is notoriously unfitted for his post, yet he may hold it for years until, some unlucky day, the full blast of public criticism falls upon him. As a rule, even then, he is not thrown out of the Cabinet altogether, but shifted to another seat where he can lie low for a while. Or he may go to the Lords. Nimble-witted lawyers of doubtful political principle are to be found in most Cabinets; so also are Party hacks—slow, safe, solid men who can be trusted never to be imaginative.

But a graver charge against democracy as it works is that because of Party intrigue, personal spite, or the strange vicissitudes of political fortune, the best and most statesmanlike among the politicians may be kept permanently out of office. It is especially noteworthy that although the present Government describes itself as "National," and embraces Conservatives, Liberals, and Labour men, neither Mr. Lloyd George nor Mr. Winston Churchill nor any worthy representative of Labour is in it. The principal living Liberal statesman, who has been primarily responsible for more solid benefit to his countrymen than any other man in Parliament, is excluded. The case of Mr. Churchill is even more glaring. He is a man of outstanding ability, keen intelligence, wide general culture—which is rare in a politician—and he has given great service to the State. Why, then, is he out of office? The only possible explanation is that others who are in are jealous of his gifts. It is certain that were he a member of the Cabinet, in whatever capacity, he would dominate it. But it is the country that matters, not the domestic affairs of the Conservative Party, and the country has the right to demand that the best men should govern.

Something must be said here of the irritating pretence that the present Government is truly "National" in the sense that all Parties are combined in it for the

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good of the State. Every instructed person knows that it is not, though the subterfuge may continue to deceive the politically illiterate. The semi-transparent humbug which is one of the worst products of our democratic system sinks to its lowest here. What difference of principle divides Sir John Simon from the Prime Minister? How is Mr. Malcolm MacDonald more "Labour" than Sir Thomas Inskip? Formed to cover a crisis and intended to last, in the then Prime Minister's own words, for a few weeks only, the Government's only ostensible reason for continuing to mask itself in this way is to save the Liberal Nationals and the National Labour men, who would be without Cabinet seats and without constituencies were the partnership dissolved. On the face of it a most chivalrous action by the dominant Conservatives ; but the motives are suspect.

The thing is dishonest ; the Government is Conservative in all but name ; it should be known as such. The label too much resembles that of " National Socialism " in Germany, " non-intervention " in Spain, the " liquidation " of alleged Trotskyists in Russia. The main political idea which has arisen since the war would seem to be that anything may be done if it is called something else. Be as tyrannous as you please if you proclaim that you are liberating your fellow-countrymen ; if you commit barbarities always do it in the name of civilization ; if you wish to persuade a bewildered electorate to vote Conservative and fear they may not be so persuaded substitute the name " National," and the trick is done. Insist that black is the true white ; it will save a great deal of argument. But if you do these things in a democratic State you are not serving democracy ; you are making it ridiculous.

The injury, indeed, done to democratic forms and the democratic spirit at the time of the formation of the National Government is incalculable. Here neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals were in the

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least to blame by any standards. The wound, deep and lasting, was inflicted by the three Labour Ministers, Mr. J. Ramsay MacDonald, Lord Snowden, and Mr. J. H. Thomas—the case of Viscount Sankey was in a different category—who repudiated their own political teachings of a lifetime, and in the hour of crisis joined their opponents. The act itself, the cynicism of it, the shabby excuses which were offered, have damaged public life in this country and dealt democracy a blow from which it might not have recovered. With a people less balanced, less calm, more logical than the British it might have led by now to Fascism or Communism. For if politicians can change their sides overnight and drop the tenets they have preached with fervour for the space of a generation who can be trusted? Would Mr. Neville Chamberlain, Sir John Simon, and Sir Samuel Hoare go over to the Socialists if circumstances changed and it suited them? Are Mr. James Maxton, Sir Stafford Cripps, Mr. Herbert Morrison sincere in their Socialism?

For more than thirty years Mr. MacDonald had taught the people with increasing success that Socialism was the only cure for their economic ills. He was one of the actual founders of the Labour Party, and by that act he had repudiated Liberalism as being little better than Conservatism. He was the leader of the Socialists in this country. By an unexpected turn of events he became, once and yet again, the first Socialist Prime Minister of Britain. After two years in his second term of office a violent storm arose in the capitalist world. Such storms had been foretold by every Socialist teacher and writer since Marx. Without informing his Cabinet colleagues of his intention, the Labour Prime Minister, with a nimbleness more adroit than dignified or creditable, skipped over to the other side and announced to the country in the morning that he was still Prime Minister, this time with Conservative and Liberal backing. The happen-

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ing, like the abdication, was entirely incredible until it occurred. No previous Prime Minister in history had brought the country to the verge of ruin, changed his Party at the last minute and retained his office.

MacDonald's simple and straightforward course was to ask the King for a dissolution, and if it was refused, go into Opposition. He should have told the country then and at the subsequent election that Socialism was the only remedy for economic blizzards; that this was his firm and unalterable belief which he had preached unswervingly all his political life; that he could not accept office unless the electorate gave him a mandate for Socialist measures and a majority to carry them out. He would not have got his mandate; he would have been handsomely beaten, but he would have kept his political honour, and, perhaps, have been a happier man for the remainder of his days.

The career of James Ramsay MacDonald, culminating in this strange collapse, is in itself an illustration of political democracy as it lives and works and may for this purpose be examined. It shows many things, even if it does not prove them conclusively. It shows that a man may rise in this country from the humblest beginnings to the highest office in the State (but Hitler and Mussolini have done the same); it shows that a man may enter politics without birth, connections, money, or education and end as Prime Minister. It shows also one of two other things: either that the complexities of government are so great and unexpected that a man of the Left must forsake his clear-cut ideals in order to govern (in which case the dream of Socialism is a delusion and the preaching of it dangerous and false), or that an elderly man who has once tasted power, one that has lived all his life austerely and in the propagation of noble thoughts of brotherhood, justice, and equality, will commit any baseness in order to retain it. It shows, further, that a man is nothing without the event; that he must be

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born at the right time and in the right place in order to ride the coming wave.

The circumstances of MacDonald's birth are well known. Being a Scotsman he had a better education for his rank than he would have done had he been English. He came to London, drifted, knew the pinch of poverty, was sometimes hungry, addressed envelopes for a living, and after some time was fortunate in becoming secretary to an M.P. His life has recently been told in detail by Mr. L. MacNeill Weir, M.P., in a remarkable book called *The Tragedy of Ramsay MacDonald*.

In after years MacDonald was represented to the British public as a Highlander with all the dash, fire, impetuosity and ardour associated with Prince Charlie's clansmen and the Gaels generally. Nothing could be further from the truth than this. His overmastering trait was wariness. He was a born trimmer, a fact which probably accounted in part for his success as a politician. He hated making definite statements of any kind, and avoided the habit with the utmost determination. He was cursed at the time and afterwards praised for having denounced Britain's participation in the Great War. He never did so distinctly. His recorded utterances of the period are guarded and non-committal in the extreme. He even sent a message of encouragement to a recruiting meeting. The exaggerated, undeserved odium into which he fell while the war was being fought served him well later, for when the inevitable pendulum swung it carried him high and into power.

As a young man he attached himself to the Labour movement. Was it idealism that made him do it, or his keen strategical eye for possibilities far ahead? Probably something of both. To the end of his life he retained both these qualities: a vague, muzzy political idealism which spilled itself in words for the poor and unfortunate, but, for the main part, shunned

hard, concrete remedies, and a sharp and accurate judgment of coming events. It was said of him by one of his Ministers during the Labour Government that he was so occupied in planning moves two ahead of his opponents that he did not know what was happening at the time. All these habits grew on him until at last his Socialism was a mere hazy aspiration—it was remarked that his maxim became “Socialism is the only remedy—but not now!”—his manœuvring ever more involved, and his guarded utterances so complicated and meaningless that at the end they served as a bitter jest to the House of Commons of which he was the Leader.

• He married a woman of great charm and character with a private fortune, and few things in literature are more ironic in the light of later events than his own account of their life together and their joint struggle to propagate Socialism (*Margaret Ethel MacDonald: a Memoir*). She was one of those women of the Fabian type who, at the turn of the century, did so much to draw public attention to the evils of sweating, unemployment among women, home-work and poverty, particularly as it pressed upon her sex. Her husband was elected M.P. for Leicester in 1906. Together they toiled to improve the lot of the masses, kept open house for refugees, Trade Union members, Socialists and revolutionaries of all kinds, toured the world together, meeting their comrades in other lands and hoping ever for the bright day of the International to dawn. She died in 1910. Useless to speculate what she would have thought and said could she have been told that her husband would become Prime Minister three times; that he would end as head of a Government supported by Conservative votes with Labour members on the other side of the House; that he would cut unemployment pay, institute the Means Test, and tax the Co-operative Societies!

MacDonald had a magnificent voice, a fine presence,

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and a rich and winning Scottish accent. He had a gift, too, for rhetoric. His speeches, like those of most politicians, seem poor and trivial when read, but uttered in that deep musical voice which carried conviction in its tones rather than its matter they could lift Labour audiences to great heights of enthusiasm. It cannot be said of him that he made specific promises and failed to carry them out. He never promised anything definite, only a Socialist Paradise, sometime, somewhere. His followers were usually satisfied with that. He was opposed to the General Strike; in fact, he hated strikes always, they were too hard and fast. Yet he succeeded. He let his Party down more than once, particularly over the Zinovieff letter which lost the General Election for the first Labour Government in 1924. Here, characteristically, he was unable to be definite and to give a clear lead on the matter. Still, he was forgiven.

In an inquiry into the merits and disadvantages of democracy the crisis of 1931 is worth close attention. It is perhaps possible to give this without being controversial except in so far as the conduct of individuals is concerned. The Labour Government was without a clear majority in the House of Commons and was dependent upon Liberal support, admittedly an unsatisfactory position. Towards the end of the summer it was faced with an alarming shrinkage of revenue, the prospect of an empty Exchequer and heavy bills to meet. Probably it will be generally agreed that this was not the fault of the Government itself, but was due to world causes. Britain was then on the gold standard. The May Committee met and recommended drastic economies. The Labour Cabinet agreed to cuts in national expenditure amounting to £56,000,000, but, not unnaturally, boggled at cuts in unemployment pay.

What followed after this is obscure and undocumented. Mr. MacNeill Weir states categorically that the Prime Minister deceived his own Cabinet. He had

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been in conference or negotiation with the Conservatives and Liberals, in view of the national crisis, as to the terms upon which they would give their support to the Government. He was, of course, the only go-between. Mr. MacNeill Weir says that he informed his Ministers that the Conservatives and Liberals were insisting upon a further cut of approximately £26,000,000, and that this must include a reduction in unemployment pay. Deadlock! It was afterwards denied by both the Conservative and Liberal leaders that any such stipulation was made.

If this charge is true it means that MacDonald deliberately lied to his colleagues for the purpose of getting rid of them. It had been clear to him that they would never agree to a cut in what they considered a bare subsistence allowance to the poorest. His only motive can have been to oust them from their seats and so manipulate the political situation to his personal advantage. Whether this be true or not it is certain that the Labour Ministers had no suspicion that he would not resign with the rest, or that, if he did resign, he would withdraw his resignation. They broke up on Sunday, 23rd August, fully satisfied that the Labour Cabinet as a whole had come to an end, and that the new Prime Minister would be Mr. Baldwin.

Professor Laski takes the view that the suggestion may have come from King George V. that MacDonald should continue as Premier.

"It appears in any case," he says, "to be universally admitted that the King played a pivotal part in securing the assent of Mr. Baldwin and Sir Herbert Samuel to his (MacDonald's) assumption of the Premiership. . . . It appears certain that the impetus to the peculiar form of the new administration came wholly from the King. Mr. MacDonald was as much the personal choice of George V. as Lord Bute was the personal choice of George III."

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Even if this supposition is accurate it is difficult to believe, remembering the man's character, that he needed much persuading. His vanity was great. He was the spoilt darling of fortune. He probably believed that he was the right man to save the country, that his name and prestige and the spectacular nature of his act would swing the electorate over to the new Government, as in fact they did. He always let it be known in private conversation that he considered himself head and shoulders, intellectually, above his Labour colleagues. But to the ordinary Englishman, whether Conservative or Labour, there will remain something faintly revolting in the way he outmanœuvred them, leaving them gaping in amazement outside the door of No. 10 Downing Street while he was snugly restored within. One seems impelled to fall back upon the expressive language of the proletariat : "diddled" and "double-crossed" are the verbs which most exactly express what he did and what they were. Undeniably clever ; albeit a trick unworthy of a Prime Minister.

But the electorate believed and supported him. He never lacked courage. He went down to Seaham and faced the angry miners who were his constituents there. (It is difficult, however, to see what else he could have done.) They howled him down again and again, but many of them and their wives must have voted for him ; he was returned. The whole country was, in fact, stampeded. He became Prime Minister with the backing of the greatest majority in Parliamentary history. A miserable remnant of the Labour Party he had smashed, enlisted by his teeming Conservative supporters, sat and glowered at him across the gangway of the House. His triumph was complete.

He still called himself a Socialist, but pleaded the national emergency against doing anything Socialistic. The earthly Paradise was postponed indefinitely. One feels that he might have used his immense power and

prestige to force his new followers to accept some at least of the measures which he had advocated all his life—particularly after the country had gone off the gold standard and the financial situation was eased. He could thus have proved his sincerity. He might have said to them: Do this and do that, or I will go into the country and tell the people you have betrayed them and me. Lord Snowden, claiming that he had been so betrayed, resigned from the Government. There is no evidence that the Prime Minister made the slightest attempt to change the essential Conservative nature of the administration. For four years he did nothing in particular; after the Silver Jubilee he decided, or was gently helped, to relinquish his great burden.

So he passes into history, the first demagogue to attain supreme office, the greatest personal success, the greatest moral failure in our political records. Not a single act of amelioration for the masses, not a single national triumph of any kind stands to his credit. He is remembered by nothing; not even a phrase such as "ninpence for fourpence," "rare and refreshing fruit," "peace in our time," "terminological inexactitude"—unless the queer sentence "on and on and up and up," which exactly expressed his mind and was so mercilessly satirized by Mr. David Low the cartoonist, passes for a memorable phrase.

But he was a portent. He was not the first politician to begin his career on the extreme Left and gravitate more and more to the Right as power came near and was at last attained. The same is true of Mussolini, of Briand and Millerand in France. But there is a vast difference in achievement. The Italian dictator, too, changed his doctrines before he attained office, not after. Of Herr Hitler it may at least be said that he has never doubled or swerved at all; that what he promised he has performed, and what he threatened he has done.

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Dictators, however, have opportunities which are denied to democratic statesmen. The only point that matters here is how far a career such as MacDonald's is conditioned by democratic forms ; to what degree he must be blamed—if he is blamed at all—and to what degree the onus falls upon the democracy which produced him. For it cannot be denied that his power, both before and after the crisis of 1931, came from the people in fair and open election. They believed what he told them first and last : should they have done so ? Does democracy lie peculiarly open to the specious promise, whether vague or concrete, and equally to the suggested fear ? For MacDonald rose first by telling the electors that if they voted for him he would improve their lot and latterly by telling them that if they didn't they would be ruined.

There can be no doubt that many of the unemployed whose pay had been cut voted for National candidates in 1931. They did so because they were informed that unless there were drastic economies in national expenditure there would be no unemployment pay at all. A simple argument, which all can understand. Twenty-seven shillings a week is much less than thirty shillings, but a great deal better than nothing.

Fear is, indeed, a trump card in politics. It has been used again and again against the Labour Party, both in national and in local politics, with what justification this is not the place to decide. However little one may have, it is better than less. Tell the electorate that unless they support the *status quo* there will be a general collapse, and, taking all things into consideration, they vote for safety. It is natural. The middle classes as a whole may not be positively enthusiastic for Conservative policy, but they vote and will continue to vote Conservative because they are terrified of Socialism ; because of their dread of losing for themselves, their wives and children, the houses, cars, and comparative comfort which they enjoy, and of slipping

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back into the dead level of poverty from which many of them have with difficulty emerged. This dread may be said to be the root motive in political action in this country, and perhaps in others. Hence the bitterness of the Communist reproach : Bourgeois ! Even the poorest are subject in times of crisis to the same appeal, as has been shown. How the Labour Party can circumvent this mass apprehension is a problem for them to decide. MacDonald took the simplest and wisest course : when the scare blew up he sided with the scarers. Dictators, of course, once they are firmly established, are not subject to the same limitations and difficulties. They have their own methods of dealing with scares and scaremongers. It is probable that if the people of Germany were allowed to know what is the true economic position of their nation to-day there would be an immediate panic among them. But as public confidence is at least two-thirds of the whole matter, and as they are not allowed to know what is not considered good for them, they sleep soundly, and, in this sense, the dictators are justified in their measures. How can a democratic Government of the Left overcome this danger ?

The point is a vitally important one. Upon it turns the question whether the people will ever be allowed by the governing classes to gain those reforms which, in the mass, they desire. It is certain that the scare will be raised anew in an extreme form if ever the Labour Party overcomes its initial difficulty and wins a working majority in the House of Commons. Credit will totter ; the pillars of economic stability will sway ; national ruin will be threatened. Socialists claim that these things happen as the result of crafty manipulation by financiers, big business men and others concerned for their wealth and privileges ; Conservatives maintain that the occurrences are the natural and inevitable result of Socialist threats to the capitalist organization of society. It is a nice point. But if the

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people vote for Socialism and are not allowed to have it, then the will of the people does not prevail and the theory of democracy breaks down. It means, in effect, that the populace may be consulted on less important matters, but in vital things such as the structure of society they must have what their betters choose for them. We come here to the heart of the matter. It is what Communists mean when they say that all-round reform on proletarian lines can never be achieved by parliamentary action ; that the men who possess supreme economic power will never permit it. Fascists agree that only by the suppression, supersession, or ruthless limitation of Parliament can their own sweeping proposals be carried out. If this be true, it is no use arguing that our democracy is free to choose its own road, seek its own salvation and so forth. It is as free as a dog on a chain ; he can walk round his kennel and no more.

This problem is implicit in Professor Laski's book on Parliamentary Government. He poses the question and returns to it again and again. He does not answer it, however ; nor is any final answer possible. He quotes Lord Balfour as having said : "It is evident that our whole political machinery presupposes a people so fundamentally at one that they can afford safely to bicker, and so sure of their own moderation that they are not dangerously disturbed by the never-ending din of political conflict." This was, as Lord Balfour pointed out, "because our alternating Cabinets, though belonging to different Parties, have never differed about the foundations of society."

"I have argued here," says Professor Laski, "that if the Labour Party means what its programme says, political parties now do differ about these foundations. Once they so differ, there is no such fundamental unity in the nation as makes possible the continuance of Party warfare on the old terms. For with the disappearance of fundamental unity there goes also the

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ability to preserve that moderation of temper which is the secret of the ability to compromise ; and as that ability is eroded by the absence of the power to bridge differences, all the mutual understandings are suspended by which the parliamentary system has been able to function."

British democracy, therefore, is confronted by this main problem : that the official Opposition, the only alternative to the National Government, is pledged to rebuild society on a non-capitalist basis. Conservatives, and some—most?—Liberals, say that this is impossible, that the attempt will bring our finely poised economic structure crashing in ruins, whereupon every one will suffer and nobody be the gainer. Socialists realize, with differing degrees of sureness and clarity, that every available means will be used by their opponents to prevent the attempt being made, through Parliament and probably outside it. When the crisis comes Conservatives may reasonably argue that any and all steps are justified in an endeavour to save the State from economic collapse ; Socialists will argue that their plans, put before the nation in a perfectly constitutional way and approved, are being unscrupulously hampered, thwarted, and sabotaged with the sole object of keeping the privileged and wealthy classes in their power and comfort. What possible loophole for compromise, for nice adjustment, is left here ? How can Socialism be grafted piecemeal upon an ancient, class-built society like our own without the consequent strains and stresses becoming too great for stability, order and even peace ?

It must be emphasized that the Party advocating this change is not a small body of extremists, as once, but His Majesty's Opposition, who are sure, in the normal course of events, of coming to power one day ; further that, if democracy is not a complete sham, they have a perfect right to proclaim Socialism as the only effective remedy for our economic disabilities and

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injustices and to persuade the people to accept it if they can. Are they adequate for the task they have set themselves? Have they envisaged its difficulties?

For if a majority of the people some day give their clear consent to a try-out for Socialism and the Labour Party are denied their opportunity through political sabotage—more or less disguised; more or less violent—in high places, there will be an end of democracy. It will no longer be possible to pretend that our political institutions are an impartial machine which all may capture by persuasion and work to their own will. The alternative will be plain: the populace must either go without its Socialism or find a substitute for parliamentary democracy. The only apparent substitute would be a dictator of the Left, but dictatorships are unmanageable things, and a dictator of the Left would be unlikely to stop at a mild British brand of Socialism. Almost certainly he would swing the wheel hard over and give us a dictatorship of the proletariat, complete, as in Russia. And there is always a chance that the other side would get in first with a dictatorship of the Right.

In either case, it means an end to democracy; an end of the great experiment in compromise and the theory of the popular will which has lasted in this country for two hundred and fifty years.

CHAPTER IV

THE SHAMS OF DEMOCRACY

THE very doubtful question whether a majority of the people would be allowed, without violence, to exercise their will in the direction of a radical change in society prompts another : Is our system of political and social life in Great Britain really a democracy at all ? Is it not rather a façade ; an elaborate pretence by which the masses are tricked into the belief that they are the supreme masters of their destiny while in point of fact they are never consulted upon any matter of real importance and the impressive machinery of elections and Parliament is so arranged that its secret controls remain permanently in the hands of a small governing class ?

These questions raise yet another : Are the great masses of the people fit and competent to decide their own political destiny ; to answer coherently and intelligently the interrogations put to them ? If not, then democracy cannot function in the present stage of social evolution, and the governing class—assuming it to be more generally capable—is perfectly justified in keeping the final reserve of power in its own hands. But this is plutocracy.

It is especially significant that the most eminent English men of letters with an interest in public affairs have been saying that democracy is a sham for the past third of a century. Mr. Hilaire Belloc and the late G. K. Chesterton were saying it before the war, in the heyday of the last Liberal Government, when

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all seemed set fair for progress. Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. H. G. Wells entirely agreed with them in this, but not in the remedy to be applied. Advancing years have not altered the view of either of them. Mr. Shaw's prefaces are full of blasting exposures of the mockery and nonsense of democratic forms. To these distinguished names must now be added that of Mr. J. B. Priestley, perhaps the head of English letters of the younger school. It would appear unlikely that all are wrong.

Writing in the *News Chronicle* on 12th January 1939, Mr. Priestley offered the following views: "I have already pointed out that, politically, we are not a real democracy. What you find behind the mere façade of democracy is a plutocracy, the good old rich, roughly disguised as an aristocracy, the good old families. We live, in fact, in a gigantic sham.

"There may have been a time when this uneasy compromise worked fairly well, during the slow revolution of the earlier industrial period. But I am convinced that it has long ceased to work for the country's good, and that now, when it has recently closed over us again instead of being dissolved into clean air, this giant sham is really responsible for some of the worst features of our national life.

"The big sham encourages all the little shams. It breeds mental dishonesty, hypocrisy, humbug. In many departments of our national life we have lost the virtue of an aristocratic system and we have not arrived at the virtues of a democratic one.

"The tradition of a feudal aristocracy and landed gentry hangs over our life like the pall of smoke over wintry London. Because of it, half our time we cannot behave like grown-up persons. Our periodicals are filled with nonsense about rich idlers. The country-house routine, with its elaborate arrangements for slaughtering creatures at stated seasons, is regarded as the great goal, life at its fullest.

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"Our more acquisitive, energetic, or cunning citizens will scheme and toil half their lives in order that at last they may change their names and lead this fancy-dress existence. Their children have hardly heard of the dark towns from which the money came. And the towns themselves, where the muck remains, reap no harvest, not even of dead pheasants.

"One reason why provincial urban life here strikes a foreigner as being dreary and rather barbarous is that nobody capable of making money settles down to be a citizen. The landed gentry tradition is too strong. Off they go, into the country. The directors go first. Then the managers and cashiers, if they can afford it, follow them.

"Do not make the mistake of imagining that snobbery is merely an old-fashioned little weakness of ours, chiefly to be discovered in the fading pages of Thackeray. It runs through our national life. It is one of the greatest recruiting forces for intolerant and ungenerous Toryism.

"As soon as anybody is really successful in this country, whether he is a man of business or with a profession, there is brought to bear upon him a soft, slow but steady pressure towards the Right. He is taken up and smiled upon by the Right People. Three times out of four, at least, the trick works. After that, though he may have come from the common people, may owe his success to the affection of the common people, he is lost to the common people. Thus we see how a vain romantic like Ramsay MacDonald was successfully beglamoured.

"I doubt if anything of this kind happens in the United States or France, where there really is democracy. One reason why we feel that in France there is more respect for intellect and artistic genius than there is here is that France no longer suffers from such a false semi-feudal tradition, with its admiration of grown-up schoolboys.

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“When we can sweep away all this snobbery and sham, this pretence of values that no longer exist, all this fancy-dress ball nonsense of brewers disguised as mediæval knights, with its bad influence in politics, its indifference to the life of the mind, as a nation we shall be immediately more honest, easier, gayer, and more intelligent. There will be less striving towards trivial ends. Life is difficult enough without complicating it with meaningless values and idiotic taboos.”

Few observant persons would deny that the central, most pervasive motive in English social life is snobbery, which may roughly be defined as an itching, insistent desire to rise into a higher class than that into which one was born, not necessarily by one's own merits, or, failing that, to be on terms of friendship or familiarity with those in a higher class, or, failing even this, to pretend that one is of a higher class than is actually the case. Few would deny also that this snobbery exercises what is in effect a stranglehold upon democracy, preventing its growth, expansion, and maturity. It takes many forms, and even pleasant, otherwise intelligent people are not free from it. To rise, to better oneself, to become more important is a natural human aspiration. All turns upon the kind of betterment to which one aspires ; in this country, because of the rooted class system which descends to us, largely unimpaired, from feudal and aristocratic days, the general ambition is canalized to this : to make money and so rise into a higher class, to buy a large house in the country and perhaps gain a knighthood, to get by hook or by crook into the small group of the wealthy and the privileged. For our society is a pyramid composed of loosely defined layers of caste, with the Crown at the apex, and so long as there is a higher class to rise into ambitious men—and even more often, their wives—will struggle and scheme to reach it. The only apparent remedy is to

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abolish class and class distinctions. A tall order, but perhaps necessary in a true democracy !

Nor does the poison of this snobbery exist only in the middle and upper middle classes. (The real upper class, the remains of the old aristocracy, are probably immune from it. But naturally ; there is nothing above them to which they can rise.) It is no respecter of rank, and exists like a disease in every strata and sub-strata of our multifiform society. It is, of course, no more comic in one section than in another, but the snobbery of artisans appears intensely amusing to the professional and managerial classes. It is an old jest that the wife of a bricklayer thinks herself better than and will not associate with the wife of a bricklayer's labourer. Snobbery is indeed a feminine rather than a masculine vice ; it appears to show itself among women in a more positive and rabid form.

Class snobbery could not exist in a true and healthy democracy ; it is important, therefore, that democrats should examine the problem as objectively as possible. There has never been a revolution in this country as in France and the United States. The "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, whether it be regarded as a mere rising of the Whig oligarchy against the restraints of the Crown or as a blow for Parliament and personal liberty, had not the slightest levelling tendency. Indeed, it left the aristocracy stronger than before, and they ruled England without let or hindrance for the ensuing hundred and fifty years. The structure of our society has, in consequence, never been changed, though the incidence of wealth has considerably altered. But the British aristocratic system has had this characteristic since the time of the Tudors at least : that it is not rigid in its confines as was the case—or almost entirely the case—in old France, and is in Germany to-day. Rich city merchants and "nabobs" from India who had made their pile could always enter it, if not personally then through their

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children. The institution was, in short, elastic, and always before the eyes of the ambitious man there has shone the knowledge that if he strove and accumulated he might end his life as a lord or at least as a baronet whose daughters might marry lords. One major stipulation only was made by the upper classes to those who sought and were eligible to join their company: they must accept the standards, the views, the prejudices, the very amusements of those whom they aspired to equal. A man who becomes rich and successful but refuses to identify himself in this way with the upper classes is tolerated, but he has no status or influence; he is robbed of the one thing which makes splendid new surroundings sweet to the average man and woman: the sense of being accepted in the higher world. He does not belong.

Comparatively few men, and still fewer women, are strong enough to withstand this negative pressure. The man, being almost necessarily of the pushing, acquisitive type—if he has made much money—does not wish to withstand it. His whole object is to lose and forget his early associations and to become in fact what he can now afford to be, a country squire, a familiar figure in the smart world, or something of both. To do this it is essential that he should gain the approval of his new neighbours and associates and be as Tory—in the worst sense—and as class-conscious as they.

But the man who makes sufficient money to qualify for a peerage and a country seat is comparatively rare. Infinitely more common is the aspiring middle class man who—urged on by his wife—strives to imitate him to the limit of his power. Hence the snob-value of fox-hunting, and, to a lesser degree, golf in this country. It is as certain as anything can be in a mixed world that for every man and woman who takes part in fox-hunting for love of the chase, nine do so because it is the correct upper class form of sport. To hunt and to shoot are the distinguishing activities of the genuine

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better off and better class citizen. In Victorian days it was necessary for the arrived parvenu to cease attendance at his dissenting chapel and go to church instead; but since religion is no longer fashionable this is not now required.

In late Victorian times the upper middle class and those who wished to appear upper middle class invented a manner of speaking English, sometimes known as the Oxford accent, by which they hoped to distinguish themselves from the mass. Every one was beginning to dress alike; there must be some unmistakable badge of superiority. This middle class accent, in which, among other peculiarities, "i" became "a," is now somewhat blown upon and falling into disuse. One difficulty was that the aristocracy never accepted it. It was widely imitated by shop-girls and minor actresses, and comedians mocked it mercilessly. But for a generation or so it flourished, to the amusement of some and the annoyance of other members of the proletariat.

These points may appear trivial, but they are symptoms of a deep-seated and chronic disease of the English mind. It is, of course, impossible to generalize satisfactorily about any class; there are beyond question hundreds of thousands of bourgeois men and women who are intelligent, kindly, well-intentioned, egalitarian, far too much concerned with their work to bother about social distinctions and snobbery in any of its forms. But it is the majority who decide a nation's characteristics as well as its political destiny, and it is impossible to deny that social pretension, with the servility, injustice, and class-feeling that go with it, is a typical and outstanding English vice. It is a powerful and inveterate enemy to democratic sentiment; how, indeed, can the noble ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity flourish in a society ridden with the itch to climb, to appear a little richer, a little more "well-connected" than is the case? How can great questions

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be freely decided by such a nation? Certainly, the ravages of the disease are nothing like so widespread in the other two democracies of the west, France and the United States.

Besides its social manifestations, snobbery works in two well-defined ways : politically and materially. It works politically because the middle classes as a whole, even the lower middle classes, who control the mass of the votes in this country, support the wishes of their social superiors at the polls. Their terror of Socialism is partly because it is egalitarian. It works materially because there is a subtle, unacknowledged conspiracy to keep the key positions in the community for the Right People, their sons and daughters.

The class system in Britain is characteristic of our people. It is unwritten, loosely defined, vague, occasionally rigid, frequently non-apparent and has a vast bulk of exceptions. Nevertheless, it is real, stubborn, and enduring, and no acute observer would deny its existence. It is pointed out by defenders of the State as it is that Mr. J. H. Thomas rose from the lowly rank of an errand boy to be a Privy Councillor and a Cabinet Minister at £5,000 a year. Lord Nuffield is instanced as a man who began in a small cycle shop and has become a peer and a millionaire. Many other eminent names are mentioned as those of persons who have climbed from poverty to high positions and affluent means. Nor can it be denied that a boy or girl from a poor home, with no requirements other than moderate luck and some assiduity, can by means of scholarships pass from an elementary school through Oxford or Cambridge and enter diplomacy, the First Division of the Civil Service or one of the learned professions. Dean Inge, indeed, who so often voices the feelings of the middle class with unusual frankness and intelligence, has publicly complained of the growing competition suffered by the sons of the gentry from working-class boys.

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On the other hand, it only needs to be remembered that at least seventy per cent. of members of the House of Commons are of middle or upper class origin, and that, almost exclusively, officers of the Royal Navy and the Army, members of the Diplomatic Corps, of the Consular Service, of the Indian Civil Service, of the higher branches of the administration, of the Church of England episcopate, of the Court, even the better paid men in journalism and commerce are drawn from the same income groups. Except in the arts, where origins do not matter, it is an immense advantage to a boy or girl who needs to earn a living to have been to a public school, which means in most cases to have had a father or mother with sufficient money to send them there. When an entirely new public body such as the B.B.C. has to be staffed from scratch the men appointed are—except on the entertainment side—fairly completely from the older universities and the big public schools.

It is authoritatively stated that only one elementary school child in four hundred is carried into a university by means of free education. Can it be argued that this is a just proportion, that it bears any relation whatever to merit or ability? If it be allowed that the ratio of able brains in the working class is as great as in any other class, it follows that many thousands of men and women just as capable as our judges, our generals and admirals and highly placed personages of all kinds, are condemned to pass their lives in obscurity and in humble, maybe hateful, tasks for lack of a fair opportunity. In other words, there is not, in our country, an open road to merit. This fact is offensive to what is generally understood to be democratic sentiment.

But the evil goes further than considerations of justice only. It divides the nation—very roughly but effectively—into two camps, those whom Mr. Priestley describes as the Right People and those who have not

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the remotest claim to this honour. In short, it divides and nullifies democracy. It cannot be denied that the Right People exist, nor that they look after each other, in the main, with zealous care, nor that they view political and social questions from a different slant from that of the masses. Though a public schoolboy may occasionally be found in prison or in the gutter; though an individual judge or Cabinet Minister may have been born in a humble home; though, on the other hand, Sir Stafford Cripps and Mr. D. N. Pritt were at Winchester and Mr. Hugh Dalton at Eton, yet it remains true that England is divided into two classes whose interests are not the same: those who claim the best things in life as by right and those who dare not make any such demand.

Widely and generally speaking, the Right People are Conservative in their politics and their outlook. As Socialist speakers say, they have something to conserve. It is impossible to discuss British politics without taking into account the glaring fact of the division of interests between those who are securely and comfortably circumstanced and those who are not. It becomes a question not of whether Conservative or Socialist policies are right or wrong, but simply that the most influential section of the community vote for a Party—and support it by every available means, fair or unfair—because they know it stands firmly for their material welfare. By any social change they are likely to be losers, and their whole political strategy is devoted to persuading the lower middle class and the working people—everybody, in short, who has something to lose if it be only a heavily mortgaged villa in a dreary suburban street—that a Socialist victory at the polls will ruin them no less than it will ruin the rich. They may be right in this view; if so, it is fortunate for them that the truth should coincide with their wishes.

This conflict of interests is what Socialist writers

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and speakers mean generally by the class war. It is deprecated by bishops and orators on patriotic platforms, but it is difficult to see how it may be abolished save by the suppression of classes and the widening of opportunity to all. It affects democracy and the democratic ideal in this way : that the governing class, their children, poor relations, hangers-on and employees, are not bound to democracy by their interests ; the proletariat is so bound. It is the plainest of plain facts that any social change in the direction of the Left—even a mere piece of reform—is almost bound to injure the property-owning classes to some extent, either by lessening their power and privileges, or by increasing their taxes and so diminishing their wealth. They thus have the closest personal interest in keeping things as far as possible just as they are. They are, in effect, in a state of siege ; they cannot retreat, they are vastly outnumbered, their sole course is to fight off, bluff, bamboozle and generally outwit the besiegers to the last possible moment. Their final stratagem—which has never failed them hitherto—is to shout from the walls that if the city is rushed and occupied by the rabble, all, besieged and besiegers alike, will go down in a common ruin. And when they say this they may be speaking the truth ; no man can tell.

It follows that the governing class, as a whole, have no real object in saving democracy or even in working it fairly. That is to say, their selfish interests are opposed to its extension or improvement ; they may have a sentiment for Parliament and the traditional forms just as many of their number, though a small minority, are ranged politically with the people against their own class. This is an inescapable fact, however much Conservative speakers may seek to disguise it. The well-to-do, the Right People, the employing and property-owning classes, have little to fear from Fascism, or so they persuade themselves ; they have everything to fear from Communism, which would

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exterminate them ; their consent to democracy depends upon its remaining in its present imperfect form.

It may reasonably be asked : What is the governing class, of whom is it composed, and how does it function ? Exact definitions of English institutions are hard to come by. There is no governing class in France ; it was smashed for ever in 1792. There is no governing class in the United States, though there is great wealth there, and wealth goes hand in hand with power. It is possible to say of an individual—as of Lord Derby, Lady Astor, Mr. Anthony Eden—that he or she is one of the governing class ; it is possible to say of a man—a farmer, a bus conductor, an author—that he is not. It is largely a question of money, but not wholly. A comparatively poor man—but not penniless—may move in the best circles and be fairly considered a member of the governing class ; a bookmaker may die worth half a million and yet never have been one in any sense. Money, plus birth and education, plus a degree of intelligence and polish would seem to be the necessary formula for admission, and if one of these requirements can be dispensed with it is money.

The governing class has no password, never meets in committee, and is sometimes divided against itself. It is said to have been recently so divided over the Prime Minister's attitude to Germany. Some of it supported Mr. Chamberlain in appeasement ; the rest believed that Hitler must be fought, and the sooner the better. It has fringes, there are several issues upon which it is not unanimous, and it cannot do exactly as it pleases in every way. Nevertheless, it forms a solid core, or rather a firm crust, to British society. It shapes the ends of policy, rough-hew them how the democracy will. It is exceedingly well-disposed to the people and the poor, but it has a natural distaste for humiliation, impoverishment and supersession. It is the heir of the old aristocratic tradition of England ; if not strictly

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aristocratic in itself it has the virtues and the vices of aristocracy. It is a little vulgarized by wealth. It has to compromise slightly from time to time with the mass of the electors who are nominally its masters, but in the main, by means of courage, coherence, political experience and guile, it gets its own way, or the way of its majority. It is the real government of England, and it has nothing to do with democracy. Its relation to the people at large is much the same as that of a lion-tamer to his beasts. By a judicious mixture of kindness and firmness it gets them through their performance. Occasionally there is a snarl from one or other of them, but as a rule it comes to nothing. Once in a thousand times there is a revolt, a leap, and blood is shed : then the trainers unite and the stupid animals are soon subdued. Why? Because they cannot effectively combine.

Besides the active, efficient, functioning section of the governing class—the comparatively tiny group who, in the main, direct the destinies of the country—there are a large number of people who take no part in affairs but who nevertheless benefit from the advantages which a plutocracy confers upon plutocrats. They are the sleeping partners of the governing class. Their comforts and privileges are secured to them by better brains than their own, and they have nothing to do but hunt, shoot, and spend their unearned money. They are the real drones of the community. It is impossible to say how numerous they are. They certainly appear to be common enough ; there is no village in the countryside which has not one or more such families in the neighbourhood, and the outskirts of the more pleasant south coast resorts are full of their elegant houses, from which they emerge in powerful, expensive cars. Presumably, these are the persons whom Socialists describe as the idle rich. They are not invariably idle, of course, but most of them appear to have an abundance of time for amusing

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themselves. Occasionally to meet such people and to read their periodicals is to realize that they are not friendly to democracy. They come out of their comfortable obscurity at election times to work for the Conservative Party and they are prominent at such crises as that of a General Strike, when they readily volunteer as strike-breakers. They—making due allowance for the usual exceptions—are fond of denouncing “Reds,” “work-shys,” and even the labouring class in general. Similar people are certainly to be found in the other democratic nations of the earth. They are a thorn in the side of democracy, and their importance lies in their rigid coherence, their very clear knowledge of which side their bread is buttered and the firm, unanimous support they give to the better type of Conservatives whenever democracy threatens a move forward. Immediately beneath them in status is the large class of those who envy and imitate them.

What of the people, the toiling masses, the vast, wide base of the pyramid? Are they the oppressed martyrs of capitalism they are sometimes represented? Or the deluded fools that unsentimental Communists describe them? Something of both, perhaps; something of neither. Are they truly fit to govern themselves without the help of a controlling class? Is it not true that a nation gets the government it deserves? Could they not if they wished, if their faith were pure and their resolution strong, make their democracy a real thing fit even for the perorations of their politicians, with the sun rising over a free and happy England, with poverty, injustice and snobbery put behind them in the dark past? Are they any better than their masters? Would not most of them, if given the opportunity, live precisely similar lives to those of the upper-class drones—hunting, shooting and loafing, snapping and snarling at any one who threatened to take away their money or their superiority? If Ramsay

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MacDonald was a fraud, were they not his easy dupes? Have they not always preferred the sham to the real? To ask these questions is almost to answer them, and to answer them in the way that Fascists would approve.

The very writers who pity the poor and plead for them despise them too. Mr. Bernard Shaw, who has fought a life-long battle for a better social order, never had and has not now the faintest illusions about the people as a mass. In the preface to *Back to Methuselah* he writes: "The British public can be humbugged and coerced into believing and suffering everything that it pays to impose on them, and any false excuse for an unpopular step will serve if it can be kept in countenance for a fortnight, that is, until the terms of the excuse are forgotten. The people, untaught or mistaught, are so ignorant and incapable politically that this in itself would not greatly matter; for a statesman who told them the truth would not be understood, and would in effect mislead them more completely than if he dealt with them according to their blindness instead of to his own wisdom."

In the preface to *Misalliance*, he writes: "And the employee has in him the same fierce impulse to impose his will without respect for the will of others. Democracy is in practice nothing but a device for cajoling from him the vote he refuses to arbitrary authority. He will not vote for Coriolanus; but when an experienced demagogue comes along and says, 'Sir: you are the dictator: the voice of the people is the voice of God: and I am only your very humble servant,' he says at once, 'All right: tell me what to dictate,' and is presently enslaved more effectually with his own silly consent than Coriolanus would ever have enslaved him without asking his leave."

In the preface to *Getting Married*, he says: "Democracy as to the thing to be done may be inevitable (hence the vital need for a democracy of supermen); but democracy as to the way to do it is like letting the

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passengers drive the train : it can only end in collision and wreck."

It cannot, in fact, conveniently be denied that there is an essential element of humbug in government by democracy. It may perhaps be added that there is an element of humbug in all government, by absolute monarchy and by dictatorship. To quote Mr. Shaw again (in the preface to *John Bull's Other Island*) : "Every English statesman has to maintain his popularity by pretending to be ruder, more ignorant, more sentimental, more superstitious, more stupid than any man who has lived behind the scenes of public life for ten minutes can possibly be."

The people are humbugged either because they are too stupid to detect the imposture, or because they want to be humbugged politically as they are humbugged by wish-fulfilment films and idiotically exaggerative advertisements. Democratically elected statesmen enthusiastically support policies which they once condemned, change sides, are proved wrong again and yet again, still the electors continue to support them. How is the trick done ? How could a man of essentially second-rate mind such as Ramsay MacDonald persuade millions to follow him ? If we pry into his demagogic secret we are baffled ; there seems no secret to discover, only an inveterate mediocrity of ideas and appeal. He had a fine voice, a good presence, and a persuasive tongue, but Mr. James Maxton is an incomparably greater orator, with an even finer voice and a presence as romantic as MacDonald's own. Why, therefore, did MacDonald rise to supreme power, while Mr. Maxton has remained without office and politically impotent ? Is the answer that Mr. Maxton is an honest man ?

If we examine the speeches which MacDonald delivered on various important occasions of his career we can find nothing in them of real vigour, no driving coherence or point, no cascades of splendid rhetoric.

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Only a vague verbosity, badly phrased and scrappy, often dropping into inelegancies and cheap, out-moded slang, with occasional heavy lumps of schoolboy humour. Some of the speeches are given by Mr. MacNeill Weir in his book ; they should be consulted. Just before the General Strike of 1926 was declared, MacDonald began a momentous speech to the special conference of Trade Union Executives in this way :

" My friends and colleagues, you can go away home this afternoon fully convinced that if the sword has been drawn your representatives stood the last two days with their hands on the hilt of that sword, doing their best to prevent somebody else drawing that sword. When it was drawn, towards midnight last night, it was not the hand of Thomas nor the hand of Herbert Smith, not the hand of any miner, not the hand of any man belonging to the General Council or to the Industrial Committee, it was the hand of the present Government that drew that sword and is now flaunting it in the face of the public of Great Britain."

Later in the same speech he said, " On Monday we will raise this in the House of Commons. We will stand our corner ; don't make any mistake about it. We will, perhaps, not be dancing about, but we will be by the miners' side, because it is a just side, an honourable side."

" Dancing about ! " What a phrase ! He went on with his peroration :

" It is the life of the toiling masses that we have been striving for, not to make enemies of society, but to make the very best friends that society has—the miner, the engineer, the worker in the field, all toiling, toiling, all honest men, able men, skilled men, contributing to the commonwealth, so that they themselves might live honourable and magnificent individual lives. That is our ideal. It is in that spirit, in that firmness of purpose—purpose you want, not words—we will stand by you. If you want us to help you in this way, we will do it."

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This speech, it is interesting to note, was made immediately after the conference had decided on the General Strike by an enormous majority. A few days after the strike had failed and been called off, MacDonald wrote as follows in the *Socialist Review* :

"The General Strike is a weapon that cannot be wielded for industrial purposes. It is clumsy and ineffectual. It has no goal which, when reached, can be regarded as victory. So to-day some critics who have responsibility for nothing blame the General Council ; some blame the miners. The real blame is with the General Strike itself and those who preached it without considering it and induced the workers to blunder into it."

Here is MacDonald when playful. He was speaking at the Llandudno Conference of the Labour Party in 1930. The second Labour Government had been in office a year and had accomplished practically nothing. Sir Oswald Mosley had resigned from the Cabinet in protest. A large section of the rank and file were growing mutinous ; they wanted action ; they were headed at the conference by Mr. Maxton. After a long, rambling speech full of vagueness about the efforts and achievements of the Government, the Prime Minister went on :

"My old comrade Maxton—friendly, but just a little bit troubled ; a very good comrade but a little bit restive ; still with his hand at the plough, but a little bit doubtful as to whether he or the majority of his colleagues ought to set the line of the furrow ; as wishful to be with us as ever he has been, but not quite sure whether he is goal-keeper, half-back, or captain of the team. No, I am quite sure that Maxton could never be a linesman or a referee ; he must have more intimate association with the ball ; and he and I are a little bit in dispute occasionally whether he shall kick it with his feet or knock it with his head."

The cleverness, or rather the cunning, of this

mixture of similes, with its implication that Maxton's real grievance was at not being in command, will be appreciated as readily as its puerile humour. Its purpose was served, for it carried the conference. Little more than a year later, MacDonald had gone over to the other side, and everything that Mosley and Maxton had said was shown, from the Labour point of view, to be abundantly justified.

MacDonald's speeches were probably rather worse than those of most successful British politicians, but many of these are astonishingly bad, and can hardly bear being printed. Nearly all are immeasurably inferior in cogency, point, and fire with the utterances of Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini, even after translation and compression. A speech recently broadcast by one of the most eminent of our elder statesmen was one long string of platitudes and clichés. Impossible to believe that such a speech was made by a man of first-rate intelligence, sincere in what he was saying.

A further point which must be remembered in surveying the democratic political scene is that some of the best men who enter the arena of party politics seem unable to remain in it, or at any rate to remain as leaders. Of those who have held high office in successive Labour Governments these are not now actively associated with the present Opposition: Viscount Sankey, Lord Ponsonby, Sir William Jowitt, K.C., Sir Patrick Hastings, K.C., Sir Henry Slessor, K.C.—now a judge, it is true—and Mr. George Lansbury, certainly the most beloved leader the Labour Party every had. At the moment of writing, Sir Stafford Cripps had been expelled from the Party for saying what everybody knows to be true: that the Labour Party cannot possibly win the next General Election without allies.

On the Conservative side Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, possibly the most respected political figure in

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the whole country, Mr. Winston Churchill, Mr. Anthony Eden, and Mr. Duff Cooper are still in Parliament, but hold no office. Probably it is not too much to say that it is precisely these four Conservative statesmen whom instructed electors, of all parties and of none, would most wish to see in the present administration. For it is always the best type of politician, never the worst, who resigns on a point of conscience, gets himself boycotted by his Party, or drifts out of politics altogether. The doctrine of collective responsibility presses hardest upon the sensitive mind, not upon that of the party hack, the careerist, or the demagogue. A Cabinet decision may be taken against the passionate opposition of one or more of its members. Once the majority have agreed, it becomes the joint decision of all, must be accepted by all, defended by all. It is difficult to defend in public an act which one regards as a disastrous mistake. Dictators are free from such obligations. It is said that two members of the Cabinet of December 1936 were opposed to forcing the abdication of King Edward VIII. Their thoughts must have been uncomfortable ones as they sat and listened to the Prime Minister's statement in the Commons and realized that in the eyes of their fellow-countrymen they were as much responsible for that shattering decision as he.

It is the basic theory of democratic government that the people are at least asked what is their will, and given the opportunity of answering. (In a sense, the same might be said of the totalitarian States.) Even if it be admitted that the card the governing class wish them to play is forced upon them; that the manner of dissolution and the issue at an ensuing election is cunningly chosen by their betters; that they, the people, are so bewildered by personalities and a multiplicity of considerations that they are never able to give a simple reply on any one point, yet it is still contended that they are in fact consulted and free to

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make their choice. Let us see how free they are and how truly they are asked.

War was declared against Germany in 1914 without the people being asked whether they wished it. Their consent was certainly never obtained to the secret commitments to France which made our participation in the war inevitable. They were not consulted during the war whether they desired a peace by negotiation. Other major events of the past twenty years in which the opinion of the electorate was never obtained were : British assistance to the White Russians against the Bolshevik Government ; the threatened war against Turkey in 1922 ; the attempted subjection of Southern Ireland by force and the peace terms afterwards offered and accepted ; the passing into law of the punitive Trades Disputes Bill after the General Strike ; the changing of Britain from a Free Trade to a Protectionist country in 1932 (at the previous election a "doctor's mandate" which, it was hinted, might include an examination of the question of tariffs, had been asked for) ; the abdication of King Edward VIII. in 1936 ; the refusal to allow the Spanish Republican Government to import arms ; the Munich agreement in 1938.

It may very well be argued that it is not practically possible to consult the people on each important question as it arises, that the machinery does not exist, that time is often a pressing factor in the issue, that members of Parliament are representatives, not delegates. This is all very true, but when it is said or inferred that the will of the people prevails, that they are the masters of their destiny, it is necessary to point out in a discussion on democracy that on the principal events of the last quarter of a century they have never been consulted at all. They have elected Party governments, usually in response to some scare or side-issue, and the Government, once elected, has controlled affairs, great and small, for an ensuing term of years.

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Nobody knows whether it was the will of a majority of the people that King Edward should go ; if we had gone into war in September 1938 nobody would have known whether the people wished it or not. This is the way in which our democracy works.

In smaller and less important matters the House of Commons frequently enacts legislation for which it has not the shadow of a mandate. A few years ago a big sweepstake, run from Dublin, attracted a large amount of interest and support in Britain. Many thousands of tickets were bought, and the prizes offered were for large sums. It was never suggested that the sweepstakes were run on other than honest, straightforward lines, but the National Government—probably, in part, to spite the Irish Government, which drew a percentage of the takings—suddenly decided to prohibit the sale of tickets in this country, and to prohibit also the publication by British newspapers of the names of winners. Private letters were even opened by the Post Office to see if they contained tickets. A pettier piece of gratuitous tyranny was certainly never enacted in any of the authoritarian States ; the measure was passed by the democratic House of Commons without the people being asked in any way for their views.

A Bill for allowing residents in urban districts to decide whether their local cinemas should be opened on Sundays had a different fate. It was passed, with many "safeguards" and restrictions. It is noteworthy, however, that a large number of M.P.'s of all parties voted against it ; voted, that is, against allowing the people to say whether their cinemas should be open or not !

The amount of personal liberty enjoyed in democratic Britain is an old subject for debate. Englishmen in the mass seem to oscillate between boasting that they are free and grumbling that they are not so free as they are supposed. Examination has been made of the contention that the British democracy is politically free ;

the question of its social freedom is more vexed, and depends upon other factors. In democratic theory one presumes that if a majority of the people voted for the closing of all public houses the public houses would have to be closed. It is possible that they would so vote, for it is fairly certain that a majority of the women would support prohibition if the issue were put to them. Such a result would raise the problem of the rights of minorities in an acute form—a difficult and untidy problem which can scarcely be discussed here. All that can be done is to compare the Englishman's traditional liberty to do as he pleases with—so far as the comparison can be made—the practice in totalitarian and other States.

It is not, of course, merely a matter of the purchase of alcoholic drink, though it is sometimes so represented. Even here, however, it should be remembered that the curtailment of the opening hours of licensed houses—and in particular the afternoon closing—was brought about as a measure of emergency during the War, and, quite unfairly, has never been rescinded. It is another of the points upon which a national decision was taken without the people being asked by-your-leave. Prohibition in the United States was at least carried by a majority.

The old complaints of "grandmotherly legislation" and Puritan interference by a small clamant group have, indeed, largely lost their force and reality in recent years. The days when Thomas Hardy could be figuratively spat upon by authority for writing *Jude the Obscure*, and Mr. Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* could be refused a licence by the Lord Chamberlain seem far behind. Might they return? It is not impossible. There is a streak of Puritanism—using the word in its stupid not its idealistic sense—in the British people which in the past has always responded to stimulus, particularly in sex matters, and might so respond again. But the issue is at least

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dormant. Novelists in England can say pretty nearly what they like ; thanks to an intelligent Lord Chamberlain dramatists are far freer than they were—they can at least approach reality—and if one is occasionally irked by the publicised complaint of an obscure clergyman that a B.B.C. comedian has been indecent in one of his jokes it is necessary to remember that in Germany a principal cabaret actor was recently put out of his profession altogether for saying that lies have short legs, which was taken to refer to Dr. Goebbels.

Even in France, which the non-Puritan Englishman thinks of fondly as the ideal land without interference, there are taboos. The French police forbade the dispatch of the late Frank Harris's book, *My Life and Loves*, through the post, and it still occasionally happens that an amazed Englishman or Englishwoman, bathing at one of the smaller French resorts, is told by a policeman that he or she must wear an ampler costume to enter the sea. These are matters of national custom and hardly within the purview of an inquiry into democracy.

Very much more to the point is the incidence, in Britain, of personal freedom as it affects the classes. The middle-class man may be fined for driving his car at a speed faster than the law allows ; he may be annoyed, when travelling, to arrive at an inn just too late for a glass of beer or spirits. These are almost the only restrictions upon his day-to-day habits which he is likely to feel. In the matter of drink he can, if he wishes, afford to buy and carry a flask. There is his cellar at home, and one or more clubs in which he can drink in company or semi-privacy, and often, for one reason or another, long after the poor man's public-house is closed. If he wishes to bet on the turf or the Stock Exchange he has but to lift the telephone-receiver ; to gamble or be gay in the accepted sense he can fly to Ostend or Le Touquet and enter the casino, or to Paris. Indeed, to the middle or upper

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class man of moderate health and no pressing griefs or worries life in England may, in theory at least, be so good that there is small wonder he sees no great need for change.

The poor man does not breathe this air of easy liberty. From his cradle to his grave he is much more supervised. However thirsty he may be on a hot afternoon or after ten or ten-thirty at night, he cannot get a glass of beer—no great hardship, perhaps, except in so far as it affects personal freedom. If he wishes to bet on a horse race he must do it furtively in the street and take care that a policeman isn't looking. Much more important than these difficulties—which many will regard as deterrents rightly applied to vices—is the atmosphere of restriction and surveillance in which the poor live. It applies to a hundred everyday things. In the country, if a labourer shoots a rabbit or a pheasant, or even takes one of a clutch of pheasant's eggs which he finds in the course of his work, he will not only be prosecuted if he is caught but lose his work, his cottage, and be forced to leave the neighbourhood with his wife and children, for the good reason that nobody else will employ him. If he happens to live in a village where the vicar's wife is of an inquiring, domineering turn, he may have to answer intimate questions concerning himself and his family and accept the lady's rebukes with silent respect. If he were rude he would probably lose his living. There are parts of the countryside where if a speaker of the Labour Party—the respectable Labour Party which has formed two Governments, and is still His Majesty's Opposition!—holds a meeting, he has no apparent audience. The inhabitants of the village dare not be seen paying him even the courtesy of attention.

Such is our democracy at its worst. Whether the peasants and agricultural workers of Germany and Italy live in this state of semi-serfdom cannot be known with certainty unless one has dwelt among

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them for a period of time, but it may be doubted. In the case of Italy, at least, it would appear extremely unlikely.

Feudalism lingers on, it is well known, in the remoter parts of the country ; in the towns things are different and better. But even here the really poor are not treated as free men. There are always the police to be watched and conciliated. And if a middle-class man is inclined to believe that the police are invariably the friendly, deferential protectors that they usually appear to him, let him grow a two-days' beard, leave off his collar, put on old clothes, and visit a poor district of London or some large industrial town where he is not known. He will find that the policeman's smiles have changed to a watchful, suspicious stare. If, best test of all, he should try to push a barrow or sell something he will find a dozen difficulties put in his way of which he would never have dreamed. He will suffer a queer feeling akin to agoraphobia ; of being watched, chivvied, overlooked. He will find it a different world. It is a salutary experience.

CHAPTER V

DEMOCRATIC VALUES

BRITISH democracy, its peculiarities, virtues and defects, is reflected in the British Press. Our national and provincial newspapers are, generally speaking, free, uncurbed by authority, and remarkably independent in tone. It would, perhaps, be true to say that they are superior in intelligence, breadth of view and tolerance to the society from which they spring and for which they cater.

Fifty years ago the daily Press was dull, stiff, formal, and completely out of touch, except in its police court reports, with the life of the masses. Until a year or two before the outbreak of the Great War, the common accusation made was that the newspapers were exclusively in the hands of millionaires, who falsified or suppressed news and opinion unfriendly to themselves, to the governing class generally, and to the big business interests with which they were closely allied. There was some truth in this. In several of the big London newspapers information about a strike, about the activities of the Trade Unions and the Socialists, or the spoken or written opinions of reformers such as Mr. Bernard Shaw, were wilfully and persistently distorted. Labour leaders, and even Liberal and Radical politicians, were driven from time to time to denounce the lying "millionaire Press" and expose its misrepresentations. The implied snobbery of the cheaper daily newspapers was equally offensive. The *Daily Mail* of that period was written on the deliberate

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assumption that the clerks who bought it all kept hunters and a staff of servants. The fashions illustrated and the cooking recipes printed in its pages were generally such that only well-to-do persons could afford them. It was, indeed, the admitted policy of Lord Northcliffe to treat his readers as though they lived in Mayfair and belonged to the upper strata of society. Despising snobbery himself, he knew as a business man the vital importance of appealing to the snobbery of his clients. He was well financially repaid for his wisdom and foresight.

None of these charges can now be sustained. The Press as a whole is less snobbish than the people who support it. It is still owned chiefly by millionaires, but some of the millionaires are distinctly on the Left in politics, or at least independent of the Conservative caucus. All—or nearly all—opinion can find utterance, and it is no longer true to say that news is doctored or suppressed. Because of a variety of reasons, the free British Press is one of the best achievements of our democracy. Much of the improvement is due to the intelligence, breadth of view, sense of humour and democratic feeling of Lord Beaverbrook, who is too often classed by indiscriminating persons with other Press lords who lack these qualities. Just as Northcliffe found the newspapers dull and pompous and left them bright, scrappy, and sensational, so Beaverbrook, taking over from there, has made them more independent, adult, urbane, and disrespectful to those in authority, no matter how exalted. That there is a wide section of the general public sufficiently educated to appreciate a newspaper of spirited independence, forthright policy, and sly humour is proved by the circulation of the *Daily Express*, which has now reached the astonishing figure of two and a half million copies a day. Its attitude to the war in Spain, during which it persistently declined to accept the inspired propaganda of either side and based its opinion

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upon facts supplied by its own observers, was a model of impartial reporting.

The London *Evening Standard*, Lord Beaverbrook's other daily journal, is notable for the cultivated outlook it assumes in its readers and for the cartoons of Mr. David Low, who fights with genius a constant battle for democracy throughout the world, and needs no tribute here. It frequently happens that Low's cartoons are in flat opposition to the editorial policy of his paper, and Lord Beaverbrook is probably the only newspaper proprietor in existence who pays a cartoonist a large salary to caricature him, and, sometimes, to ridicule his own announced policy. No small man would do this, and the unique situation confers distinction upon both its participants.

One newspaper insensibly influences another, and the tone of all has noticeably improved since the war, and, indeed, during the past ten years. Partisans of the Left in politics can no longer complain that they are unrepresented, inarticulate, ignored. Apart from the *Times*, which maintains, in its news columns, the same lofty aloof fairness as of old, they have the *Daily Herald*, with a circulation of more than two million copies a day in which to express the official Socialist point of view, that is, the agreed view of the Labour Party upon all things high and low. If they are Communists they have the *Daily Worker*, which is widely distributed. They have the august *Manchester Guardian* and the *News Chronicle*, an excellent newspaper, which is Radical by tradition and sympathetic to Labour. They have also the frequent support of the *Daily Mirror*, a paper of large circulation and of the very type which was formerly hostile and derisory to "progressive" claims, but now in its editorials is friendly, tolerant, and sometimes even approving.

It is surprising that with so strong a Press the Left should have made recently a poor showing electorally. With the exception of the sensational result at Bridge-

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water, the by-election returns do not indicate any marked swing of opinion away from the National Government, and at the moment of writing it appears fairly certain that a third General Election will be won by the combination of Conservatives, Liberals, and National Labour. It is remarkable that the election of 1929 was won by Labour in spite of the opposition of practically the whole of the national Press, with the exception of the then insignificant *Daily Herald*. Those days have gone, yet the Socialists and the Left parties generally make little apparent headway. The fact is of significance to students of democracy and its workings. If the reason be that the normal swing of the pendulum away from the Party in power is arrested, not by admiration for the achievements of the National Government but by a deep and unconquerable distrust not only of Socialism but of the abilities and leadership of the Opposition, then it is plain that the people as a whole do not take their politics from the newspapers they read.

The Government's case—and that of the Conservative Party—is put by a Press scarcely inferior, if at all, to that of the Opposition, though less powerful if circulations be the standard. It has the incomparable services of the *Times* and the staunch support of that admirable newspaper the *Daily Telegraph*, which may perhaps be said to represent the British middle-class tradition at its best—a tradition of fairness, tolerance, good humour, calm, and common sense. It is to be regretted that the *Morning Post*, spear-head of the extreme Right, should have lost its entity. It was an excellent newspaper, fighting a vigorous rearguard action against what appeared at one time to be the overwhelming forces of Socialism; it was frequently praised for its essential fairness by its firmest opponents. There should have been room for such a journal, as there should also be room in London for a definitely Christian daily paper of a not too vague and flocculent

type, and also for a secularist daily run to further the principles of the Rationalist Press Association. It is right in a democracy that all the main groups of opinion should have daily newspapers of their own. The difficulty, as every one knows, is twofold : to find the necessary capital and to be assured of the volume of advertisements without which no national daily journal can exist. It is said to be impossible to start a new national daily with capital of less than a million pounds.

While British democracy has a right to be reasonably proud of its Press, the displayed advertisements which alone make that Press possible are rather a matter for shame. Indeed, as the newspapers have improved, becoming generally more intelligent, judicial, and informative, so, by a contrary process, the advertisements, printed side by side with the news and features, have become ever sillier and more of a slur upon the democracy to which they are addressed. It is impossible to exaggerate the absurdity and vulgarity of many of these appeals to buy. Ageing women are promised youthful beauty, and, probably, a rich husband if they will use a named face-cream ; miracles of restoration to virility and vigorous health with consequent increases in salary and better appointments are assured to those who buy and consume various patent foods and drugs. Soaps are advertised not as good in themselves but as aids in winning back a husband's love or securing the attentions of men ; chocolate cream of a particular brand is suggested as an adequate substitute for a meal. The numerous remedies advertised for constipation—and, indeed, for almost every ailment and disease short of cancer and tuberculosis—will instil in posterity a poor opinion of the health and bodily habits of this age. No exaggeration, however wild, however near to fraudulent misrepresentation, is apparently ruled out by the advertisement writers and those who pay them as being impossible. What of the democracy which believes, or

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half believes, these patent falsehoods? What of the thousands who, suffering from neurosis, over-work, or unsuitable work, are persuaded that a drug will make them well? What of the men and women who prepare these mendacities; of a community which is taught to believe that any method, any lie, is permissible and rather good fun providing it sells one's commodities? Impossible to believe that a healthy democracy would tolerate such gross and offensive travesties of salesmanship. Yet it is partly by their aid that the great national daily and Sunday papers are able to provide the public with so very much more than their money's worth.

It is frequently asserted that the big national advertisers seek to influence policy. There is truth in this, but only in the sense that social boycott seeks to influence conduct. If, for instance, this country were at war and a daily or weekly paper opposed the war and described it as wicked and unjustified, advertisements would certainly be withdrawn. Had a journal of standing refused to acknowledge the abdication of King Edward VIII. after it had been signed and accepted by the nation as a whole, there can be little doubt that the journal would have suffered a serious fall in advertising revenue. The big advertisers like calm social weather and flourish only in such conditions; they fear disruption, political storms, and discontent, knowing that the first thing to sink will be their sales. They are bred of capitalism; they do not exist in Russia. Their unseen power, like that of all great corporations and business enterprises, is considerable but circumscribed. It is fruitless to inquire whether they are necessary; such questions belong rather to a discussion of the relative merits of capitalism and State Socialism. They are a part of democracy, of themselves neither essential nor inimical to it. Their part in its deliberations and decisions is limited; their activities are naturally tainted with its snobbery and

its other defects. A democracy of higher tone and improved taste would surely be provided with better advertisements than the worst we have, but, as is patent to all, many national advertisements are pleasing, tasteful, truthful, or only playfully exaggerative. The railways, London transport, and some of the brewers may be instanced as leading in this matter, but theirs are mostly poster displays.

It may be said therefore, without much qualification, that our newspapers and periodicals are free. It is not so in the totalitarian States. In recent months an appeal has been made to the German public by means of a stamp-obliterating message to buy more newspapers. There can be no doubt at all that the decline in sales is due to State control. What is the use of buying newspapers when all are bound by law to say the same thing, and that thing is probably untrue or at least distorted? It is difficult to imagine—though the effort is worth making—what social life would be like in this country if the appearance of all Liberal, Socialist, and Communist newspapers and periodicals suddenly ceased under severe penalties; if all the others, without exception, were bound to praise and defend the Government whatever it did; if no loophole—except private conversation, and that dangerous—were left for criticism; if even features, general articles, cartoons, and comic strips were heavily censored, by fear if not actually; if the range of the very jokes were severely restricted. Is it not certain that the effect would be a heavy fall not only in the prestige of the Press, but in its sales also? The mere monotony, the gramophone nature of its utterance, would destroy the curiosity and interest to which its appeal is made.

We have here a powerful argument in favour of the democratic system, however limited and defective it may be. Our freedom in this respect needs to be appreciated, savoured. Reforms, if they cannot be

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obtained, may at least be formulated and abuses denounced. Every idea and desire which is not against the law may be put forth in print ; all tastes save the scabrous are served by journalism in this country. The safety valve is wide open always, and there are no secret police to report private discussions.

This liberty of the printed and spoken word extends to fiction and the theatre. Novelists are free to attack the existing social order by every avenue open to their art, and many of them do. Their best and most engaging characters may be Jews or Communists, or both ; they may lavish their descriptive powers upon the squalor and suffering of the poor, and lampoon employers, aristocrats, judges, and ministers of State. Several of the most eminent are far to the Left in politics, and make no secret of it in their work. Of the better known of our younger poets, the majority appear to be Communists.

Similar conditions prevail in the theatre. Of new plays recently produced in London, several have pointed a moral against war, and others, such as *Love on the Dole*, against poverty. In a revue played a year or two ago in the West End, a bishop making a recruiting speech was bitterly satirized. Mr. Somerset Maugham's recent play, *For Services Rendered*, was a savage attack on the false values of patriotism. If British democracy is not purged of its snobbery, injustice, and wrong it is not the fault of the present generation of artists.

So many of the films shown in British cinemas come from the United States that they cannot be judged as a reflection of our own democratic life. There are many excellent British-made films, however, which are popular and successful. A recent instance has been *The Citadel*, based on Dr. Cronin's novel, a picture, adult, moral in the best sense, and civic in its outlook. Something must be said, nevertheless, concerning the falsification of English history, which is too often

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offered to, or thrust upon the public in films both American and British. Whether this is considered a matter of importance must turn upon individual opinion. Some will no doubt argue that a film is soon seen and soon forgotten, and that it is pedantic to ask for literal accuracy in the artistic presentation of history. They will point to historical novels and plays—even to Shakespeare's—as instances in which history is stretched, over-simplified, or even misrepresented to fit the needs of a plot. The difference lies in the universal appeal of the films and their effect upon children of school age.

Most people will cordially agree that a democracy should have a true, rounded, and coherent idea of its own past. The propaganda textbooks of totalitarian States are much condemned. It is certain that a large part of the history taught in our State-aided schools is false, false in emphasis and interpretation if not in fact. When to this general misleading is added the particular distortion of outstanding incidents and characters in films, the minds of the children who see them must be confused beyond clarification.

In a recent picture which was widely distributed, Queen Elizabeth was shown face to face with Mary of Scotland. Now the whole point of the drama between these two women is that they never met; to show them in conversation is an unpardonable liberty to take with the known facts of the past. The film must have been seen by many thousands—perhaps millions—of school children; how can they possibly be expected to reject what they have seen with their own eyes in favour of what they are told in the classroom? It may be said that the matter is trivial; that it is of no importance to democracy whether Elizabeth ever met her cousin or not. The answer is that education is of supreme importance to democracy, and, further, that truth has a sanctity of its own. It is important that the rising generation should not be given false

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facts—and still more important that they should not be given false values—about historical events. Also, it is not only what the film producers have done but what they may do that causes a shudder. To judge by recent cinema versions of continental history, almost any chain of happenings in the recorded past may be reduced to the outline of a commonplace love story.

Many of the non-fiction films to be seen occasionally are excellent. The "March of Time" series is well known; most of the Nature pictures, which in the opinion of many are shown too seldom, are educative and interesting in an extreme degree. The news pictures, though generally having a slight bias in favour of authority and the established order, offer a vivid supplementary to the daily newspaper, and there exist a variety of films not made by the great companies—such as a kind of illustrated lecture by Professor Julian Huxley on food values and their effects, and the history and growth of the Co-operative movement—which are useful and stimulating. On the whole it cannot be said that British cinema audiences are badly served; still less that they would be likely to get better pictures and a greater choice under an authoritarian government. If many of the stories are silly and incompletely related to the actualities of life, some are not; there is room for the exercise of individual taste and discrimination. Considered as general propaganda for the existing state of society the films shown in Britain are fairly innocuous; that is, their bias is not unreasonable, and the censorship, though occasionally irksome, not too drastic.

An even greater propaganda power is that of the British Broadcasting Corporation, and here, from the strictly democratic standpoint, there is room for little but praise. This is not the place to discuss the popularity of crooners or of jazz music; presumably they are enjoyed by the great majority or they would not be heard so often. In the departments of serious music

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and of "talks" the Corporation provides its gigantic audiences with the greatest boon yet given to the people in all history. No subject becomes topical that is not immediately discussed by experts—usually without partiality—on the radio. Criticism is offered; short stories and poems of merit are read; plays of value are performed, and always there are programmes of the world's best music to be heard. It is inconceivable that these new amenities of entertainment and instruction should have no effect upon the democracy at large; if many are too stupid to accept what is offered them and "switch-off" all items which require the slightest concentrated attention there are surely even more who, if only occasionally, listen to serious discussions and informative addresses. Because of the B.B.C. there is no longer any reason why the masses should be ignorant or ill-instructed on any question of the hour. Affairs in France, Germany, and Italy are, from time to time, carefully explained to them; there has recently been an admirable series of lectures on problems in the Pacific; every Saturday evening Mr. Raymond Gram Swing gives from the United States his invariably interesting summary of events there. Time alone will prove the value of these educative influences; it is sufficient to record here that superior sneers about the ignorance of the "rabble" will soon have lost their reason if not their truth.

On home politics the B.B.C. is as impartial as can reasonably be expected. A speech by a Minister is almost immediately followed by an answering speech from an Opposition leader. If the Government of the day is given a larger proportion of opportunities than its opponents, this can scarcely be regarded as grossly unfair, and would, in any case, have the reverse effect once the opponents had gained power. There seems no sound reason, however, why Mr. Harry Pollitt, for the Communists, and Sir Oswald Mosley, for the British Fascists, should be denied the right of

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addressing listeners. If they are allowed, as they are, to address gatherings of citizens in public places, there can be no valid excuse for refusing them the wider opportunities of the wireless. It would be decently fair and refreshing, too, to hear an occasional secularist lecturer answer the sermons and religious addresses which are allowed to be broadcast in such large numbers.

The real danger to democracy inherent in the B.B.C. lies in its potentialities ; not what it is but what it might become. At a time of national crisis, the stations would certainly be taken over by the Government and permitted to broadcast only such news as the Government desired to be known. The Government news might be reasonably fair ; it might be otherwise ; there would be no check upon it and no chance of contradiction. It is possible to envisage a particular kind of emergency in which national broadcasting might be used against the democracy as a whole, and with disastrous effect. There would, however, appear to be no effective means of preventing this ; the peril lies in the nature of the instrument itself. Any devisable kind of independent control would at once be swept away with the coming of the emergency.

The familiar bias of the British social system—that is, of the ruling caste—sometimes appears, stark and unlovely, in B.B.C. broadcasts. The most memorable occasion was the notorious address of the Archbishop of Canterbury on the Sunday evening following the abdication of King Edward VIII. The Archbishop's singularly ill-chosen words offended the nation's sense of kindly regret so deeply that for days afterwards the correspondence columns of the newspapers were crowded with letters of protest from Churchmen and non-Churchmen alike. Yet no reply of any kind was allowed on the air, which had been cleared of all competing programmes in order that Dr. Lang might make his authoritative pronouncement. Apparently

his position as Primate of all England is too august to permit of his being answered or rebuked.

A dictatorship or semi-dictatorship, whether of the Fascist Right or the Communist Left, would, it is certain, make short work of the pretensions of the Church of England as the official and only authorized Christian body in this country. True, the price for the ending of this and other similar anomalies might be considered a heavy one and too high. Nevertheless, the position of the Church of England in the community to-day is not democratic; it is a survival and an anachronism. It represents through its active members less than ten per cent. of the nation; it is hopelessly divided as to belief and doctrine, and it gives itself—it is forced by law to give itself—the state and arrogance of a Church embracing the overwhelming majority of the people. The King and the Royal Family are compelled to be of its communion; it is no part of democracy, yet it thrives and maintains its privileged pre-eminence because of the cumbrous slowness of our democratic means of change.

Its connection with the State is an offence to sincere Christians and non-Christians alike. Because of this secular connection its spiritual value is largely nullified. Its archbishops and bishops are obliged to live in palaces and to receive what to humble people seem enormous salaries for their work as Christian leaders; its vast wealth is fantastically distributed, some of its ministers receiving too much, many not enough to live in reasonable comfort. Because of the dead past from which its power and prestige spring it is too often allied with the ruling class in their prejudices and material prepossessions. Many of its ministers, particularly in the country districts, make no secret of their sympathy with Conservative or even reactionary views, and behave towards their flock as squires and petty tyrants, benevolent or otherwise.

The control of the House of Commons over Anglican

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doctrines and practices is grotesque and offensive both to Christian and democratic sentiment. In a debate on the reform of the Book of Common Prayer some years ago, members of Parliament of all shades of religious persuasion and of none spoke and voted on this intimate and domestic matter. They included a Parsee Communist. The effect of the debate was to provide a perfect subject for the ribaldry of unbelievers. At the present moment bishops are appointed to their sees, in theory at least, by a Prime Minister who is himself a Unitarian. The festering scandal of the whole position can only be ended by the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church of England, and a live and vigorous democracy would apply itself to these purposes without delay.

CHAPTER VI

TOTALITARIAN CLAIMS

"THE poorest twenty-five per cent. of the German nation is to-day better fed and better housed than the poorest twenty-five per cent. of the Scottish nation."

This categorical declaration was made by Sir John Orr, an expert on nutrition, and director of the Rowett Institute, Aberdeen, in the course of an address given to the Edinburgh City Business Club and reported in the *Manchester Guardian*.

Sir John Orr proposed a five-year plan for Scottish agriculture and housing.

"The schemes are easy," he said. "What Scotland needs to-day more than anything else is a spiritual revival that will give Scotsmen a new sense of values, that will fill every Scotsman's heart with shame and indignation when he looks at things in Scotland, and compares them with other countries."

Poverty and unemployment were much greater in Scotland than in England, Sir John went on. The proportion of houses unfit for habitation was six times as great in Scotland as it was in England. There was nothing like the poverty in the Scandinavian countries and in Belgium and Holland that there was in Scotland, and their infant mortality rate was only about half of ours.

"In the light of that," Sir John asked, "is democracy as we find it in Scotland to-day worth defending? For some of us it is; but when we come to the lowest twenty-five per cent. and the unemployed man, who

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has a family living in the slums I have often thought it does not matter two hoots to him what system he is living under.

"Mark you, that is the man you are going to ask to go into the front line in the event of war. While we go on with our rearmament, which is necessary, I firmly believe it is even more urgent to raise the standard of the poorest twenty-five per cent. of this country to make it worth while for them to defend democracy."

The two things which Scotland needed most urgently, he went on, were to get food and housing improved as rapidly as possible. If they were going to have people well-fed they would have to produce the food, but they would also require a system whereby it was brought within the purchasing power of the poorest. Marketing Boards would require to be remodelled. At present they were boards for restriction in the interests of a small group.

A national housing scheme was required in which a working-class man could obtain a house according to his needs and would have a rent according to his income. Indeed, that was the system Germany had. Housing should be lifted out of the realm of trade and commerce and treated in the same way as education and hospitals.

Sir Philip Gibbs in his recent book, *Across the Frontiers*, writes thus:

"Democracy will not win a victory over dictatorships unless it can prove its capability of producing happiness, and the general welfare of those who enjoy its blessings. Are we in England and Scotland and Wales presenting this picture of democratic blessedness to the totalitarian States? We still have, as I write, 1,800,000 unemployed, among whom many are losing heart, living in squalor, neglected by public indifference, physically unfit, ill-clothed and wretched. In democratic America there are 11,000,000 unemployed,

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not in very good shape. Democracy will not hold its place before the driving efficiency of dictator States with their ant-like discipline if it is shoddy, disorderly, undisciplined, physically unfit, without pride in work, without a sense of dignity in labour, without enthusiasm or dynamic purpose to uphold its ideals."

Similar appeals to the conscience, the common sense and the spirit of comradeship of democracy might be added from recent books by many earnest men and women of the better type. Have they any effect? None is apparent. Things drift on as before. Mr. Bernard Shaw, who, with all his gifts of wit, derision, drollery and indignation, has been beseeching the British public for the past half-century to get rid of poverty, inequality, shams and injustice and build a better and truer democracy, admits in his old age that he might as well have saved his ink. In the introduction to his *Prefaces*, he writes :

"The contrast between the wisdom of our literature and the folly of our rulers and voters is a melancholy proof that people get nothing out of books except what they bring to them, and that even when the books explode their prejudices and rebuke their villainies they will read their own dispositions into the books in spite of the authors, and hang up their instruments of torture and their bullet-riddled banners in the very temples of Mercy and Peace. All the preachers and writers who have been anything but mouthpieces and scribes for human vulgarity are still waiting for earnest attention, though their statues and epitaphs are all over the place and their books in every library.

"All the political futility which has forced men of the calibre of Mussolini, Kemal, and Hitler to assume dictatorship might have been saved if people had only believed what Dickens told them in *Little Dorrit*."

The question therefore arises : Have the dictatorships achieved what the democracies—or, at least, British democracy—have failed to do? Or, it being

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agreed that they are not perfect, have they removed the harsh incidence of poverty from the lowest mass of the population? If so, another question proposes itself: Is it necessary for the people to submit to a dictator to get rid of poverty in its more oppressive and indefensible forms? For the twin curses of British democracy are poverty and inequality; its advantage—said to be overwhelming—is a measure of freedom unknown in the totalitarian States. In this connection, an observation of Stalin, given in an interview, may be quoted. He said:

“It is difficult for me to imagine what ‘personal liberty’ is enjoyed by an unemployed person, who goes about hungry and cannot find employment. Real liberty can only exist where exploitation has been abolished, where there is no oppression of some by others, where there is no unemployment and poverty, where a man is not haunted by the fear of being to-morrow deprived of work, of home and of bread. Only in such a society is real, and not paper personal liberty possible.”

A difficult proposition to answer, this. The late Captain Bourne, Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons, said once in his breezy way that it was still possible in Britain for a man to say: “This is a damned rotten Government!” But precisely what satisfaction does this power afford to a man—a shipbuilder of Jarrow, a miner of South Wales, or a cotton-spinner of Lancashire—who has been unemployed for years, who spends his waking hours, day after monotonous day, hanging aimlessly about the streets of his native town or village? He has probably cursed the Government so often that he has grown tired of doing so. He may have voted consistently for a period of years to effect a change of Government, only to be perpetually out-voted by those in the prosperous south and in the agricultural areas. What can he do to help himself and his comrades? Of what use is this vaunted

"freedom" to him? The answer to both questions is, Approximately nothing!

Probably no subject engaging the public interest at the present time is so entangled in prejudice and interested controversy than the claims to the social betterment of their peoples made by the various dictator States. A home-keeping Englishman—or even one who has paid short holiday visits to Russia, Italy, or Germany—may well despair of getting at the truth. Experts are divided, and the non-expert, if he offers an opinion, is told brusquely that he is deceived by partisans, that he knows nothing about it. A brief excursion is derided as useless; persons who have made a longer stay are told they are Communists or Fascists, whichever view their observations lead them to support. The tying-on of the label is taken as clinching the argument. Of none of the countries concerned is this more true than of Russia.

Yet Russia remains what it has been for the past twenty-two years, the most interesting experimental workshop in politics in the world. Surely so much can be asserted without the fear of angry contradiction! Have the Soviets really succeeded in eliminating the worst hardships of poverty, in abolishing the corroding evil of unemployment and the shadow of its dread, in lifting, even in slight degree, the whole level of the daily life of their peoples? If they have done so much, it is a mighty achievement. How can one get at the truth about Russia? There are probably a thousand books purporting to give that truth; some full of praise, some full of a bitter disillusion; few which both contending sides would agree upon as impartial. Perhaps impartiality is impossible. One of the most recent of these books is *Russia Without Illusions*, by Pat Sloan.

Mr. Sloan is friendly to the Soviet régime. He appears to be a member of the Communist Party, though this is not explicitly stated. He cannot, there-

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fore, be regarded as non-partisan and without bias. If his word is accepted in general, it will be necessary, from considerations of fairness, similarly to accept the accounts of friendly observers in the case of Italy and Germany. Mr. Sloan is at least no hurried holiday visitor, annoyed by the officiousness of Intourist guides, by the hard seats of railway carriages, or by finding a bug in a bedroom. After taking a First in Economics at Cambridge, he became interested in Russia, went there to live and work for five years, came home to England, and went back again to Russia. He has taught in Russian schools and acted as a Trade Union official in Moscow. It cannot be said of him that he has seen life under the Soviets only from the outside, through the eyes of a segregated foreigner, as must inevitably be the case with most newspaper correspondents. Obviously, he speaks Russian well. He claims to have gone to the U.S.S.R. with no anti-Communist axe to grind, and equally without pro-Soviet illusions. He admits, moreover, that there are remediable faults in the social life of Russia ; that there are a few beggars still, and that the acute housing shortage has not yet been overtaken.

He begs his readers to remember what the country was like under the Tsars. He points out that in 1917 Russia, one of the most backward countries in Europe, was feeling the disastrous effects of three years of war. After the peace of 1919, "on the pretext of defending their property interests, one government after another gave support to rebellions by Russian generals against the Soviets, and, as in Spain to-day, a small internal property-owners' rebellion became a war of armed intervention. Ten foreign armies operated on Soviet soil. The combination of ruthless war with the problem of introducing new methods of government and new forms of productive organization had a disastrous result. The invading armies, as they began to be defeated, destroyed every productive unit before retiring.

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The level of industrial production by 1920 had been reduced to twenty per cent. of the pre-war level, and agricultural production fell to one-half of that of Tsarist Russia in 1913. The country was faced with one of the worst famines in Russian history; not caused by the revolution, but by that war of invasion which an already impoverished country had to face from 1918 till 1921 and in the Far East till 1922."

Because of this and other causes, Mr. Sloan claims that Socialism in Russia has only been achieved, in the roughest outline, in the past five years. It is fair that these provisos should be remembered. Even to-day, he says, Soviet policy is not that of a Socialist government in conditions of peace and security, but of one which knows it is surrounded by enemies and ready to defend its frontiers in a world already at war. Here are his general conclusions :

" In spite of its isolation, the U.S.S.R. has succeeded in setting the world an example in a number of respects. First of all, it has succeeded in establishing a social system in which inequalities due to sex, race and nationality have been eliminated. It has set up a society in which citizens are judged by their work—all must work, there is work for all. Each person may develop his or her capacities to the full through free education, and, having developed them, there is an opportunity to use them. Citizens, according to their ability, rise to the highest posts in the country. The Supreme Council of the U.S.S.R. consists of individuals elected for their merits at work. No Soviet ' Member of Parliament ' has fought an election on his wife's inherited wealth. There is no House of Lords in which there is only a full attendance when a progressive law in the interests of the working people has to be obstructed. In the U.S.S.R. people do not see their portraits in the Press for going to Ascot or Lords, but for flying across the North Pole, growing sugar-beet, or mining coal.

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"Secondly, the Soviet Union has succeeded in so organizing the economic life of the country that it is working according to plan to meet the needs of the community. This has been made possible by turning the land and the means of production into public property. It has resulted in the abolition of unemployment and the provision of a steadily rising standard of life to the whole people through constantly rising wages and falling prices. In doing this the Soviet Union has accomplished what capitalism has never at any time been able to do.

"Thirdly, it has been possible in the Soviet Union, in spite of the appalling backwardness of the Tsarist Russia from which it emerged, to provide both leisure and security to the working people. The average working day in Soviet industry is under seven hours, the maximum is eight hours. A minimum of two weeks' paid holiday a year is guaranteed to all workers. Free medical, hospital, and maternity care are available to all who need them, and pay is given when a worker is off work due to illness. In the case of pregnant women, four whole months off work on full pay are guaranteed by law.

"Fourthly, the U.S.S.R. has been able to provide freedom for the working population actively to participate in the running of their own affairs, whether it is a case of the factory where they work or the block of flats where they live. Criticism by those who work of their fellow-workers and of those in authority over them is a fundamental part of Soviet life to-day. This freedom to criticize those in positions of authority, whether practised by students in a university or workers in a factory, gives a scope to personal initiative and expression that results in the fullest development of the personality of the ordinary Soviet citizen.

"Fifthly, in the international field, a community has been organized on one-sixth of the earth's surface in which no man, woman, or child gains a penny from

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arms manufacture, and in which no working man or woman depends on arms production as the only possible source of employment."

Mr. Sloan protests that it is unscientific to take conditions in England alone as a measuring-rod; even if this is done, however, he contends that in the five respects he has enumerated the U.S.S.R. has even surpassed this country.

Some interesting pages in the book are given to descriptions of travel in Soviet territory, not as an Intourist but as one of the people. At the time of which Mr. Sloan writes all travelling arrangements for tourists who were Soviet citizens were in the hands of the Society of Proletarian Tourism and Excursions, which he joined.

"All round Moscow," he writes, "in the most beautiful country districts, the Society had already by 1932 built up a network of tourist bases to which workers from the town could make excursions on their free days. The usual excursion was for one or two nights, leaving after work on the evening before free day and returning the next evening, or, if the shift started later in the day, the morning after the day off. Such excursions were developed on a considerable scale, and I participated in one or two before my summer holiday began. It is rather surprising that while sanatoria and rest homes have received world-wide publicity, this Society, catering for some two million holiday makers a year, has hardly ever been mentioned in the Press or books written outside the U.S.S.R."

After describing his own travels as a Proletarian Tourist—an extended holiday which appears, on the whole, to have been extraordinarily pleasant—Mr. Sloan gives other interesting facts. He mentions casually having met, while walking in the Caucasus, two girls aged about twenty-three who were workers in a chemical factory, had a paid holiday of six weeks,

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and a six-hour day when at work. This was because they were engaged in an occupation considered bad for the health. Both of them were studying in evening classes and anticipated becoming qualified technicians within a few years. Both also had received grants from their factory in order to assist them to spend their holiday travelling.

"It is hard to realize, I think, for us who live in England," says Mr. Sloan, "the extent to which holiday travel has become an accepted thing among the ordinary working people of the U.S.S.R. While still in Moscow I was not a little surprised when I found that my landlady and her daughter were planning a visit to the Crimea for a month during the summer. My landlady actually received two weeks' paid holiday, and was taking another two weeks at her own cost, a thing often done in the U.S.S.R. Although she was by no means a person with high earnings, she calmly decided that she and her daughter should make the three days' journey to the Crimea and three days back ; a far longer journey than an Englishman makes when he pays a visit to the south of France.

"It is also interesting to note that while I knew them the grandmother also had a holiday. Through my landlady's brother it was arranged that she should go for a fortnight to a rest home connected with the electrical workers' union—not, of course, free of charge, as she herself was not a member of the union. I mention these details because in our own British conditions it is hard to imagine similar people in similar circumstances going any great distance for a holiday, though possibly they might have a week at the seaside very occasionally. Certainly, in the U.S.S.R. people of corresponding economic position have vastly greater holiday opportunities than their fellow-workers in this country, and they make full use of them."

So much for Russia. It should be added that Mr. Sloan's book is moderate and unimpassioned in tone,

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and gives an impression of being the truth as he saw and knows it.

Coming to Italy, one is faced with the same inherent difficulty in discovering a completely impartial account of changes in social life since the Fascist Revolution in 1922. The information here given is, in consequence, obtained from the official publications, in English, of the Italian Government.

By the Labour Charter of the Fascist State workers are guaranteed a day's rest each week and a half day on Saturday, or its equivalent. This extra half day, though common if not universal in Britain, was not a right or even a usage in Italy prior to the Fascist Revolution.

All categories of workers are also guaranteed holidays with pay. This law is in advance of the prevailing custom and regulations in Britain.

There is a forty-hour week in industry—a step in advance which democratic France won only to lose again, and which is still no more than an aspiration in democratic Britain. Agricultural workers have an eight-hour day. It is important to note here that, according to a speech made by Signor Mussolini in November 1933, there were in Italy on April 21, 1931, 2,943,000 farmers working their own land, and 858,000 tenant farmers. On the same date there were 1,631,000 crop-sharing farmers and peasants, and 2,475,000 other agriculturists, farmhands, wage earners, and seasonal workers. The total population directly connected with agriculture was 7,900,000. If each worker be reckoned as representing three other persons, we have the enormous total of 31,000,000 people living by agriculture in Italy.

In the same speech, Signor Mussolini declared that there are only 201,000 real estate owners and persons living on (private) income in Italy. The contrast between these conditions and those obtaining in Great Britain is too obvious to need emphasizing.

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The Labour Charter regulates the extra hours worked by all classes of labour. There is also provision for what is described as delayed dismissal and compensation for dismissal for all workers. No such regulation exists to protect the manual worker or even the lower grades of clerical workers in Britain. In many trades here a man or woman can be dismissed at a moment's notice. Every employee in Italy who is dismissed has the right to a minimum of fifteen days' notice to a maximum of four months', according to his grade and his length of service, and to compensation equal to at least fifteen days' salary for each year of service. Workmen, who are apparently placed in a category lower than that of employees, have varying terms according to their contracts. The lorry-drivers of Venezia Giulia, for instance, can demand ten days' notice, six days' compensation for each of the first two years worked, and eight days' for every successive year. Workers in the daily newspaper business are given two weeks' notice and twelve days' pay for every year of service. It should be added, however, that summary dismissal is permissible as a punishment for certain specified offences.

The age limit for children in employment has been raised from twelve to fourteen. Illness on the part of a worker, provided it does not exceed a certain period, cannot result in dismissal. For employees and workmen with a monthly wage inferior to 800 lire insurance against sickness and old age has been compulsory since 1923. The insurance is made up of equal contributions by employer and workman. In 1933 the insurance bodies were reorganized as the National Fascist Institute for Social Providence. Many improvements, it is claimed, were introduced. There is insurance against accidents at work. Maternity insurance has been much extended by a Royal Decree of March 1934. Insurance against tuberculosis is compulsory for workmen. The insured are entitled to

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treatment in sanatoria and in convalescent homes which are said to be among the most beautiful and perfect of their kind. Endowment insurance for young workmen is not yet general and compulsory. It is still, together with marriage premiums, being studied among the various problems for the future. Free help and advice is given to all workers by their vocational associations, presumably the Italian equivalent of Trade Unions, especially with a view to insuring that they enjoy all the benefits to which they are entitled by law.

Most of the other workers' amenities existing in Britain obtain in Italy. There are also Labour Courts for the settlement of individual disputes. So far as can be ascertained there is no stable body of unemployed. Work exists for all ; as a result there can be no large semi-submerged mass of the population living in hopeless poverty on the alms of the community. In addition, the Italian Government is engaged in a vast scheme for making the nation self-sufficient, *i.e.* independent, at least in the emergency of war, of foreign imports of all kinds. It remains to be seen whether complete success will attend upon this scheme, and if not what measure of actual success will be attained. It is noteworthy, however, that in democratic Britain the Government has not even begun to consider the possibility of such an effort even in the supremely vital matter of food, in which we are infinitely more vulnerable than the Italians.

The Dopolavoro, or National Leisure Hours Organization, in Italy is an institution the counterpart of which is unknown in Britain. It exists to look after the working masses, keep them fit, and enable them to enjoy themselves. There appears to be no regimentation about it. Its activities are divided into three groups : cultural instruction, physical training, and social welfare. The following extract is taken from the Italian Government's booklet on Dopolavoro :

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"Let us take, for example, a workman in a city factory. What does he get from the Dopolavoro? He has a dining-room where he can eat during the dinner hour. No more cold food, unwholesome and expensive, eaten out of doors in rain or shine, but hot food, very cheap, eaten at a table as he would eat at home. He has a club of his own, either at the factory or in his quarter of the town. This club offers him, instead of the perils of the public-house and bad company, the possibility of honest amusement. He can meet his friends, play games, and eat at the cheapest rate. Here he finds all the means and opportunities for sport: that is, keeping himself in good physical condition. He has schools, evening classes, lectures, libraries, which allow him to improve his education. His ideas are enlarged, he acquires a new view of his own work and a desire to improve himself.

"The same workman can, through the Dopolavoro, take part in activities of a sporting and educational nature; activities such as were formerly beyond his reach. His Dopolavoro membership card gives him a considerable rebate for cinemas and theatres and sporting events. Thus he can afford every form of amusement enjoyed by the wealthy classes. The Dopolavoro also offers him, by means of the 'Car of Thespis' and by performances reserved for members of the organization, entertainments for Saturdays and Sundays at very cheap rates. A new world is open to him.

"And his family? His family can avail themselves of special markets and enjoy a special discount in many shops. They can also send their children to the sea and mountains for the summer holidays."

In 1937 there were 3,180,000 members of the Dopolavoro, and 21,695 centres. The headquarters of the Railway Workers' Dopolavoro in Rome are installed in a fine modern building comprising a theatre seating 1,500 spectators, 100 guest rooms, a restaurant and a

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café for the exclusive use of railway employees on their way through Rome. Does anything similar exist for the use of railway workers in London?

Travelling theatres providing plays and operas tour the country, and local amateur dramatic societies are encouraged and helped. From 1930 to 1937 four "Cars of Thespiis" performed 40 plays and gave 1,382 performances. The operative "Car of Thespiis" provides stalls capable of seating 3,000 persons with another 3,000 in the galleries; on special occasions 10,000 places are provided. The stalls and stage can be assembled or taken down within a few hours; the car has a staff of 350.

Dopolavoro also organizes orchestras of string instruments for the diffusion of classical music, and weekly concerts are given all over the country. Concerts are also arranged in factories and workshops between shifts. Choir schools have been instituted and developed, and the first choral competition, held under the direction of Mascagni, had 2,000 performers. Dopolavoro has 2,853 bands with 87,078 participants, and 258 string orchestras with 4,869 participants. The singing and dancing groups number 333, and have given 7,348 performances. In 1937 there were 706 Dopolavoro cinemas with 38,528 films, and 94 travelling cinemas with 3,973 films. The best Italian and foreign films are chosen, and the subjects range from amusement to education. Nearly all the Dopolavoro centres, especially in the villages, have been provided with communal wireless sets.

An arrangement exists by which members of Dopolavoro have only to produce their membership cards to obtain a fifty per cent. reduction on the cost of theatre tickets. Also, it is now compulsory for all theatrical companies to give special Saturday performances for Dopolavoro members and others in the principal cities of Italy. The price of tickets must not exceed two lire (about 5½d.) for the stalls and the first

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two series of boxes ; one lira is charged for the first gallery (? upper circle), and half a lira for the highest seats. Not less than ten per cent. of the audience must be composed of those receiving relief from the Welfare Associations ; these are admitted free.

What similar cultural facilities exist for the working class and the unemployed in Britain ?

Dopolavoro organizes a yearly competition for the best short stories submitted in each of the ninety-four provincial centres ; the competitors must be employees and workers belonging to Dopolavoro. Every branch has its own library, varying according to the number and type of members. A plan for instituting a travelling library and bookshop for every provincial branch is under consideration.

" Much patient organization and preparation were required," it is stated, " to make headway in stimulating the interest of the masses in folk dances, because of the foreign dances so much in vogue as to have corrupted even the conservative and traditionalist peasants."

There are wide facilities for physical training and sport, and 200,000 members are enrolled in the sports section. Every kind of game is played, and there are national competitions for massed gymnastics. Excursions of all sorts are arranged, from ski-ing week-ends in the mountains to walking, fixed and itinerant camping, marching, shooting, cruising, voluntary re-forestation (what an excellent idea !) and cycling. Members of Dopolavoro may obtain a fifty per cent. reduction on the State Railways for all return fares from Saturday to Monday for groups of not less than five persons, with similar concessions on trams, motor coaches and small steamers. Members also enjoy special reductions in hotels and pensions throughout Italy, with free insurance against accidents. In August and September thousands of members flock to the holiday camps.

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In Britain it is only the upper and middle classes who can enjoy week-ends away from home.

A Health Service is run in connection with *Dopolavoro*. Its activities include health propaganda, instruction in first aid, the institution of consulting clinics for special diseases, the provision of discounts for members in nursing homes, hospitals and chemists' shops.

A letter from an Englishwoman resident in Rome, which appeared recently in the *London Observer*, may usefully be quoted here.

"I live in Rome," she writes, "and on many summer nights I have sat in the open-air theatre of the twenty thousand enthralled by the excellence of the performance and the beauty of the setting. There are a few other assets besides the twenty thousand seats. The orchestra from the Royal Opera, Mascagni conducting his own works, the singing of Gigli. The most expensive seats cost six shillings, the cheapest fivepence. This is briefly what is meant by the theatre of the masses."

Where in democratic Britain could a working man obtain such entertainment for fivepence?

Hitler Germany as seen by a Foreigner is written by Cesare Santoro, and is issued in an English translation under the auspices of the German Government. Consideration of Herr Hitler's foreign policy, with its threat to the democratic States and its inconvenience to the British Empire, will not be given here. All that concerns this discussion is the improvement or otherwise in the general lot of the majority of German citizens since the coming of the National Socialist régime in 1933. It is impossible to deal even with this in detail. The book runs to 432 large pages of small type; the whole field is surveyed with characteristic German thoroughness. It is especially noteworthy that we find in essence the same ameliorations, the same solicitude for the general well-being of the

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working class in Russia, Italy, and Germany alike. Choice as to which of the three systems is the best, the freest, the most widespread and the most advantageous for its participants must depend upon close knowledge of the working of all, and even then probably be a matter of opinion. The outstanding point is that the question of political freedom apart, a great deal more is done to help the poorest and most hard-pressed section of the people than is attempted here.

It is claimed, to begin with, that unemployment has been practically abolished in Germany as in Italy and Russia. The number of unemployed when Hitler took office, says Mr. Santoro, was 6,014,000. It has now (1938) been reduced to 338,000. "Of these, over one-half is accounted for by the normal changing of jobs, while the remainder are more or less incapable of employment."

Mr. Santoro goes on: "It is interesting to observe that since January 1933 the number of employed workers has risen from 11,500,000 to 20,400,000, which means that besides some 5,500,000 persons until then unemployed, more than 3,000,000 additional workers have been able to find employment. The average number of hours of work per day has increased from 7.26 to 7.86. The national income, which amounted to Reichsmarks 45,300 million in 1932, totalled Reichsmarks 68,000 million in 1937, an increase of more than Reichsmarks 23,000 million. That part of this income which represents wages amounted to Reichsmarks 5,900 million in 1933, but exceeded Reichsmarks 12,000 million in 1937."

If these figures are accurate, the German workers certainly have cause for gratitude to Herr Hitler!

The vast unemployment problem which confronted the National Socialists when they came to power was tackled by means of great public works, including the construction of the Reich motor roads, subsidizing private enterprise, reduction of taxation, and the lessen-

ing of labour competition by the withdrawal of workers for the fighting and labour services. Thus some 500,000 young men are at present in the Labour Camps, where they are fed, housed, and given a small wage in return for road building and other similar work. The total sum appropriated for the direct creation of work amounted at the end of 1935 to 5,518 million marks.

"The re-employment of many thousands of jobless workers," says Mr. Santoro, "contributed to increase the purchasing power of the masses, thereby augmenting the sale of articles of food and other necessities of daily life. This, in its turn, afforded the possibility of creating further work."

This obvious consequence has been urged as an argument upon successive British Governments over a number of years, but without result.

Apart from an appeal by Herr Hitler himself to the whole nation to find work and give work, all kinds of ingenious methods were used to increase employment in general. The State contributed 500 million marks in 1933 towards the expenses incurred in the reparation and reconstruction of dwelling-houses. It paid one-fifth of the total cost involved. House owners desirous of transforming big apartments or business premises into small flats were repaid half their costs by the Reich. The purchase of new material, of machines, of professional apparatus, was encouraged by reductions in taxation. At one time it was forbidden for German cigars and cigarettes to be rolled and packed by machinery. Inscriptions on the packages "Packed by hand," and "Packing by hand supplies bread for German workers," emphasized that the law was being enforced to the benefit of thousands.

Young unemployed persons from the big cities, numbering 160,000, were sent to work on the land. A large number of women and girls found employment in households owing to the reduction in taxation granted to householders who engaged them. Marriage

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Loans were granted to young couples on condition that the wife had been a worker prior to her marriage, and was prepared to abandon her occupation. Mr. Santoro says that hundreds of thousands of women were taken out of the labour market by this means, and their places occupied by unemployed women and men. Also, the furniture trade received a great impetus because of the loans.

The "Strength through Joy" movement roughly corresponds to Italy's Dopolavoro, but is claimed to be larger and more widespread. The figures given by Mr. Santoro indicating its activities are astonishing. Before the coming of the National Socialist régime, he says, millions of persons in Germany had never seen a theatre from the inside. The number of persons who have attended theatrical performances through the "Strength through Joy" movement is over 22 million; 18,600,000 have visited cinemas, and 5,600,000 concerts. Film performances were given in 700 camps to over 100,000 workers employed on the Reich motor roads.

Since 1934 a total of 384 sea voyages with 490,000 participants, more than 60,000 excursions on land (19 million participants), and 113,000 hiking tours (3 million participants) have been organized by the movement, which has also started to build a fleet of ocean-going passenger ships of its own. A gigantic seaside resort to accommodate 20,000 persons was in course of construction in 1938.

There is a sports section, by which since 1934 some 21 million persons have taken part in sports practice. "Every big undertaking, of whatever nature it may be," says Mr. Santoro, "is or will shortly be provided with its own sports ground, its own swimming bath, and its own recreation grounds. A fleet of yachts is at the disposal of amateurs of aquatic sports, which are greatly in vogue at all bathing resorts. The constantly growing popularity of winter sports has received a new

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impetus thanks to the reduction in price of skis and skates."

A section for popular education has as its object "the education of the nation in the sense of the National Socialist ideal." Most subjects appear to be taught as in English technical institutes and polytechnics.

The first duty of the "Beauty of Work" section is to ensure that "the rules of modern hygiene and cleanliness are strictly observed in all factories, workshops, offices, stores, shops, and other places where manual or intellectual work is performed. Its second duty is to see that they are fitted out according to æsthetic principles and in such a way as to render work therein a pleasure." Improvements of the kind named have been made in 23,000 workrooms, 6,000 factory yards, 3,600 ships! More than 5,000 villages have taken part in the campaign for improving the amenities of the countryside.

Another section includes persons who have received a special training in National Socialist ideology. One of their duties is to ensure the success of all public celebrations. Still another section has the duty of establishing soldiers' homes and of ensuring the best possible relations between members of the fighting services and the nation.

The most important organization of private assistance in Germany is the National Socialist People's Welfare Organization. Mr. Santoro explains: "Hitler's dictum, 'One for all, all for one' has found in the creation of this organization its loftiest expression. Help for the individual in distress is no longer considered as almsgiving, but as a manifestation of the will of the community to succour its necessitous members by all the means at its disposal, and to encourage them to pursue their route as free and independent personalities capable of rendering service later on to the nation, each of them in his respective sphere."

The assistance given by the Organization is es-

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entially of a supplementary nature; it in nowise dispenses either the State or the municipalities from their primordial duty of helping necessitous persons. The two main institutions created by the Organization are the "Mother and Child" and the "National Winter Help Work." There are 26,000 "Mother and Child" offices, one for each local group of the Organization. The total number of helpers exceeds 227,000, of whom 100,000 are voluntary. In 1936 there were 160 homes for children and 308 homes for mothers. In 1937 480,000 children were enabled to enjoy a holiday in these homes or in the country. In the same year 71,000 mothers and about 8,000 babies found accommodation in the homes. In the summer of 1937 the Organization ran 4,319 day nurseries and kindergartens in the country during harvesting, in which an average of 103,000 children were looked after each month. Up to the date of this record, some 2,700,000 women have sought the assistance and advice of the "Mother and Child" offices.

Statistics of the Winter Help Scheme are even more remarkable. They can only be summarized here. When the work began in 1933, 17 million persons were in need of assistance. Because of the subsequent decrease in unemployment this figure fell to 8.9 million in the fifth winter, that of 1937-38. In this connection, says Mr. Santoro, it is important to observe that the number of persons who are cared for by the scheme is greatly superior to the number of the unemployed, since it embraces all old-age and other small pensioners, as well as all persons of restricted means and those who had formerly been unemployed for a long time. During the first winter, 1933-34, the Scheme was able to collect a sum of 350 million marks, rising to 410 million marks in 1937-38. In 1936-37, 550,000 tons of potatoes, 2,100,000 tons of coal, 4,000 tons of meat, and 9,300 tons of fish were distributed among the needy.

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Everybody is expected to help. There is the "one-course Sunday" on which only a single course worth at the most sixpence per person may be served, whether at family tables or in restaurants, the profits thus realized being handed over to the Scheme. On other week-ends street collections are organized. Field-Marshal Goering and Dr. Schacht have themselves been out in the streets with collecting boxes. Supplies of food are furnished in the country by the peasants, in the towns by wholesale and retail dealers. A certain percentage is given from all salaries and wages. Persons with banking accounts, as well as all industrial and commercial firms, are invited to give a monthly donation. Lotteries, the tickets for which are sold for sixpence, are organized in the streets.

So vast has the Scheme become that, according to Mr. Santoro, it not only represents the largest potato and flour market in the world, but is also the biggest buyer of fish and other articles of food. The supply of fish to the Scheme amounts to twenty per cent. of the total supply to the whole of Germany. About 9 million pounds of fish were filleted for the Scheme within ten months at Hamburg, thus affording employment for many hundreds of workers at Altona. The Scheme made possible for the first time the maintenance in active service of the entire high-seas fishing fleet of Altona even during those months which had hitherto been regarded as a period of inevitable stagnation for the industry.

When during the drought of 1935 a shortage of fodder led to an increased slaughter of cattle, the Scheme expressed its readiness to take over large quantities of canned meat. In the same year several hundreds of thousands of tons of vegetables were canned, also by the Scheme. During the winter of 1936-37 the Scheme bought up some 19 million kilogrammes of fresh vegetables which, in consequence of an exceptionally good harvest, could not be sold

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in the open market, and would otherwise have been destroyed.

Few persons in Great Britain, reading these facts, will not exclaim: Why on earth can we not do something on the same lines here?

Other national advantages inherent in the Scheme are indicated by Mr. Santoro. The coal distributed during the winter of 1937-38 would keep the mines of the Saar region fully occupied for four months in order to supply it, while transport of the coal required 200,000 trucks—or would have done if a special system of distribution had not been organized. The two million pairs of boots and house shoes for the Scheme's relief work during the same winter were made chiefly in the border regions of the Reich, providing employment for many workers. Even the manufacture of plaques and badges sold in aid of the Scheme has its uses. The diamond-cutting industry in Idar-Oberstein, we are told, was able to occupy 2,000 workers for four periods of twelve weeks each in their making, and other industries were stimulated in the Erzgebirge and the Thuringian Forest.

With the reincorporation of Austria in March 1938 an unexpected and colossal demand was made on the Scheme, says Mr. Santoro. Up to the beginning of June 1938 some five and a half million dinners had been served on 200 field kitchens set up in various parts of Austria, and foodstuffs and clothing coupons to the value of five and a half million marks had been distributed. To the same date, 92,000 children from Austria had been brought to various parts of the Reich for holidays of several weeks' duration. The total contingent for 1938 numbered 140,000. Up to the beginning of June 1938, 743 trucks of foodstuffs and clothing had been sent into Austria. By the time the Scheme started its winter operations for 1938-39, 1,264 more trucks of foodstuffs, particularly potatoes, grain, fats; sugar, meats and cereals were to have gone

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into Austria, with 73 trucks carrying clothing, principally shoes, suits, dresses, and underclothes. By September 1938 it was estimated that 86 million marks would have been made available for alleviating the more urgent distress in Austria.

The other side of the picture, indeed !

Christmas trees distributed under the auspices of the Scheme totalled more than ten per cent. of the entire consumption of Christmas trees in Germany, while the number of books it distributes is three times greater than the annual total of books published (printed?) in Germany. The Scheme has thus developed into an indispensable factor of German economic life.

Describing the Scheme as "Socialism in action," Mr. Santoro emphasizes that its activities have no regard to politics, race or nationality. "As Chancellor Hitler said at the opening of the winter season, 1935-36: 'We exclude nobody. We combat the Communists, and we strike them down if necessary. But if a Communist says, "I am hungry" then he must be given food.' The number of foreigners who received assistance in 1937-38 was approximately 90,000. Jews in poor circumstances are given assistance through the offices of the Jewish Winter Help Scheme."

Such are the principal German social ameliorative schemes under the Third Reich. They offer an example of national comradeship, of true fraternity, which no Englishman, citizen of the United States, or of any other democratic nation will wish to ignore, deride, or belittle. In Great Britain, instead of the Winter Help Scheme, we have the Public Assistance Committees and the hated Means Test. Our object, instead of doing as much for the poor as possible, appears to be to do as little as possible. Yet Britain is a far richer country than Germany. If there is a glut of herring on our coasts they are thrown back into the sea ; there is nobody to organize their distribution to the poor. Boot and shoe operatives are out of work

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while millions, probably, of English persons are ill-shod with leaky, painful footwear. Cotton operatives are themselves drawing unemployment relief while working women economize with old clothing. Could human stupidity be more crass or more purblind?

In the United States there is a system already in operation by which surplus oranges from California and surplus butter are distributed to the needy in part-relief. A broad plan on similar lines still awaits inauguration and development in Britain. Why? Why should the oldest and greatest of the democracies be so mean, so slow and hesitant in generosity towards its more unfortunate citizens? Is it the spirit that is lacking, or is it the democratic method—so cumbrous, officious, mechanical and smothering to the kindly impulse? Is it leadership that we need, and cannot we have leadership and democracy too? If not, which is to go?

Meanwhile the unemployed Englishman or Scotsman who points to Russia, Italy or Germany and asks why what is done there cannot be managed here is told: You are free! You can vote for whom you like! You can say it's a damned rotten Government!

CHAPTER VII

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF DEMOCRACY

IN examining the claims of democracy to be the best form of human government a number of arguments arise for consideration. One test alone, however, is of real importance. It is: Does democracy make for the greatest happiness, material and spiritual, of the greatest number? So far as British democracy is concerned it is difficult to answer this question with an unqualified affirmative. The most that can be said is that, remembering our traditions and our national temperament, it is probably better for the majority than a conceivable authoritarian government would be, and that its gross defects and shortcomings might, given good-will, be remedied without changing the essential principle of government.

It would be obviously unfair to pile up for inspection the advantages enjoyed by the mass in totalitarian States and ignore entirely what is being done for the people in democratic Britain. What, then, have we to show in the way of "progressive" legislation and effort? What solid, material benefits do we offer the average working Englishman as the fruits of democracy? The less tangible gift of comparative freedom has already been discussed. Of itself, it amounts to little enough, but its psychological effects are certainly great. What of education, medical services, hours of work, holidays with pay, compensation for accidents? This same average Englishman will, as always if it comes

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to a crisis, fight for his democracy because he will also be fighting for England and home; but, if he finds in due time that the common people in the authoritarian States are treated less as natural born labourers and inferiors and more as individuals with an inherent right to the best that can be provided for them, he may lose his faith in democracy and seek to change it. Nor could he be blamed for doing so.

It is difficult indeed to discover concrete examples of the ways in which the English working classes as a whole are better off than the working class in Russia—which, of course, is the only class in Russia—in Italy, or in Germany. Nor does it appear simple to make such comparisons without the most intimate knowledge of the three countries concerned, with all the intricate factors involved. Again, what are called the working classes are not the only people to be considered after all. Are the British middle classes better off than those in similar positions in Germany and Italy? Probably, but it is hard to make a categorical assertion. Even if they are, the cause might be other than the form of government under which they live. And what do we mean by “better off”? They may earn more money, work for work, and enjoy greater leisure; but are they taxed less, have they greater security?

How is it possible usefully to compare a nation like the Italians, with their vast agricultural population and large proportion of land-owning farmers and peasants, with an excessively urban and industrialized nation like the British? The single fact that an incomparably greater number of Italians own and till their soil must provide a core of satisfaction and solid content in Italy which does not exist in this country. This advantage, however, is not the result of Fascism, for it existed when Italy was a democratic State, and even before.

What of wages and the general standard of living? Here again it is difficult to draw exact comparisons.

We have seen that in Italy a wage of 800 lire a month is regarded as being above the poverty line. Taking the exchange rate at 88 lire to the pound, this works out at a little more than £9 a month, or about £2 a week. But, bringing all things into consideration, is 800 lire *in Italy* the equivalent of £9 a month *in England*, or more, or less? Certainly the average British mechanic, manual worker, artisan or general employee earns more than £9 a month, but can he buy more with the money he earns?

Britain, beyond question, is a land of plenty—for those with money to buy. Every conceivable kind of food, drink, dress and commodity is to be obtained in our shops. The lag is in consumption, not in distribution. It is not so in the totalitarian States. There is a shortage of butter and edible fats in Germany, and a shortage of many products, such as cotton fabrics, in Russia. On the other hand, there is no appreciable unemployment in either of these lands, so that the average sum of spendable money must be higher. Certain commodities, however, cannot be bought because they are not there. The difference would appear to be that while in Britain all things are available but some cannot buy, in the totalitarian States more can buy but there is less to sell.

No comparison has yet been made here between Britain and the other democracies. According to Mr. Lloyd George, only 5 per cent. of our population works on the soil. Germany has over 30 per cent., the United States 30 per cent., and France over 40 per cent. France has a strong and numerous peasantry and democracy too; also, there are few unemployed Frenchmen. Further still, the shops in France are just as well stocked as the shops in England, while the French people are considerably freer, politically and socially, than the British. The same is probably true of Holland, Belgium and the Scandinavian lands. If there are faults on both sides, therefore, it is not

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democracy which need be arraigned, but only the British brand of democracy.

Before even British democracy, however, is condemned as inefficient, old-fashioned, shabby and insincere, it will be as well to see what it is capable of doing at its best, though hampered by all kinds of mouldering interests and prejudices. No better example, perhaps, of the British democratic system at its highest can be found than in the work of the London County Council. It cannot, alas! be said that this work is typical of the country as a whole. The Report on Tuberculosis in Wales has recently shown the poverty, waste, ignorance, neglect and nepotism which can exist in the democratically governed country districts of Britain. It is probable that a similar report on Scotland would reveal even worse conditions, and these facts must be steadily borne in mind when considering the achievements of London.

It is very possible that London is the best-governed capital city in the world. It is controlled—under the national laws enacted in Parliament—by a body freely elected by the citizens on the best democratic model. Of recent years, whether because of a change in the Party in power or other reasons, its work has been greatly extended and improved. Even before this increased impetus began, the betterment in the municipal conditions under which Londoners had lived and laboured since the days before the Council was created had been enormous. As a democratic achievement, indeed, the work of the Council stands out and shines.

The L.C.C. is the authority for elementary and secondary education in London, and has 433,000 children in its elementary schools. It also spends over £1,000,000 a year in maintaining 27 secondary schools and aiding 52 others with a total attendance of 39,000. In the opinion of education experts, the quality of the

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teaching and the equipment of the schools is equal to that in any part of the world. The national educational systems of France and the United States are considered superior only because they are practically classless. (Foreigners, we are told, are invariably astonished when they learn that children in England are given different varieties of education according to the means of their parents. They are still more astonished when they are informed that the instruction provided in expensive schools is not necessarily better, but may even be worse !)

The estimated expenditure of the Council on all education for the year 1937-38 was approximately £14,000,000. There are nursery schools and babies' classes. Promising pupils from the junior schools, for whom neither a purely academic nor an entirely technical nor commercial education is best suited, go to central schools, which provide a four-year course of advanced instruction on general education lines. Grants of £13 a year are made to necessitous parents to enable them to keep the children at school after they have reached the statutory school-leaving age.

Many children who live in densely populated areas are taken by the Council one day a week to open spaces, part of the time there being given to normal instruction under open-air conditions and part to the playing of games. Several large sites have been acquired outside London for this purpose. Every year, large numbers of children leave London for the country and the seaside on what are known as school journeys. These journeys are in no way school holidays. The children receive definite instruction, and every facility that the district offers for such instruction is carefully used. They may learn practical arithmetic from measuring a field, history from examining an old cathedral, or the elements of natural science from the observation of plant and animal life. Closely

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akin to the school journeys are educational visits to museums, picture galleries, docks and a variety of other places. (Incidentally, the Council possesses two museums of its own, the Horniman Museum, which is devoted to ethnology and zoology, and the Geffrye Museum at Shoreditch, which contains collections of furniture arranged in suitable groupings to illustrate social life in various periods.)

The cinema is used in the schools for instruction purposes; allowances are made for "musical appreciation" concerts, and grants to school bands and orchestras. Children are taught to swim and play games. If they are unable, owing to lack of food, to take advantage of the education available, the Council provides them with dinners. Milk or cod-liver oil and malt are provided if the school doctors so prescribe. All children are medically inspected. The general welfare of the children, and the after-care of those leaving school, are in the hands of 5,000 voluntary workers who form the Care Committees.

There are schools for the blind and the partially sighted, for the deaf and the partially deaf, schools for the mentally defective, and schools for the physically defective. Children debilitated or with a tendency to tuberculosis attend open-air schools for a period of about eighteen months. Neglected or delinquent children are sent to approved schools. Children over three years of age for whom indoor relief is required are boarded in residential schools and children's homes. There are eight establishments of this kind, with a small seaside convalescent home for fifty children. The training ship *Exmouth* is also maintained by the Council.

About fifty-three per cent. of the pupils in the London secondary schools are admitted free. The Council assists the University of London with an annual maintenance grant, and maintains four training colleges for teachers.

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At the technical and evening schools almost everything is taught from languages to architecture, from piano making to plumbing. There are also day continuation schools in which boys and girls from fourteen to eighteen are given further education on a part-time basis after leaving the elementary school. There are literary institutes for adults, both men and women, who desire to pursue some course of purely cultural study. There are self-governing men's institutes; women's institutes in which housewifery is taught, but where students can also read and play games.

The scholarship system controlled by the Council is extraordinarily extensive, and provides a complete scheme by which a gifted boy or girl may proceed—at least in theory—from the public elementary school to the university, technical college, or other institution. There are scholarships enabling students to be trained as teachers; scholarships from evening classes tenable at full-time day courses in art, science, commerce, or technology. To these scholarships is attached a grant, which may be as much as £160 a year. Booklets are published by the Council informing the ratepayers what is being done in their schools, and open days and local exhibitions are held frequently. The Council, as education authority—in its own words—"aims to furnish the citizens of London with every type of education, whether formal, cultural, physical, recreative, or vocational, to enable them to take and hold their places as members of one of the greatest communities in the world." It may reasonably be doubted whether Berlin or Rome, or Moscow, Paris or New York can point to anything finer of its kind.

But this is only one department of the Council's work. The L.C.C. maintains 74 general and special hospitals; it administers Public Assistance and has 10,500 inmates in its institutions, and an average of 75,000 outdoor recipients of relief. It is a great land-

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lord, with over 90,000 cottages and flats on its estates ; it controls 104 parks and open spaces. Its fire brigade has a total strength of 2,412 officers and men. Ten thousand calls reach the fire brigade in a year, and the ambulance services receive 55,000 calls. The L.C.C. maintains the principal sewers, the main highways and far-reaching health services.

The Council's hospital service is the largest in the world, no less. Four out of every five hospital beds in London belong to the L.C.C. Over 19,000 babies are born every year in L.C.C. wards. A complete midwifery service is provided in their own homes for mothers who require it. In addition, every mother who books a maternity bed has call, any hour of the day or night, on a free ambulance service. When the confinement at home is difficult or dangerous, a new "flying squad" arrangement is available. Within ten minutes an obstetrical specialist, nurse, and full surgical equipment, including blood transfusion, can be in any mother's home. No woman's life which could by human intervention be saved need be lost in London.

Of the 74 L.C.C. hospitals, 29 are general hospitals. They were taken over only ten years ago from the Poor Law and the Metropolitan Asylums Board. In these ten years a revolution in their administration has been brought about. The old Poor Law infirmaries, notorious in some cases for nineteenth century methods and general slackness, have become first-class hospitals with the latest equipment, much of which hospitals dependent on public charity cannot afford. Dungeons, gas-lit and gloomy, have been transformed into brightly decorated, airy wards. Impossible buildings have been pulled down. New hospitals are being built ; old hospitals are rebuilt to comply with the rigorous standards of modern times.

The L.C.C. hospital at Hammersmith is the British post-graduate medical school, where doctors from all

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over the country and the Dominions attend for refresher courses under full-time professors, who do not have to earn their main living in Harley Street. (There are no honorary consultants in L.C.C. hospitals ; all specialists are paid.) It is the most up-to-date teaching hospital in Europe, and compares favourably with the highly praised similar institutions in the United States. Ten years ago it was an ordinary workhouse infirmary.

The general hospitals have special clinics attached to them for the treatment of rheumatism, heart disease, pulmonary diseases, cancer and orthopædic troubles. Attached to St. James's Hospital, Balham, there is a plastic surgery clinic where four out of the five plastic surgeons in this country form the unit. Their work is re-sculpturing human flesh and making the hideous—through disease or accident—able to take their place in society.

One of the finest cancer clinics in the world is that controlled by the L.C.C. A young surgeon attached to the Lambeth L.C.C. Hospital has been responsible for one of the greatest surgical achievements of our time. He is saving hitherto hopeless cases of heart disease. Where choked arteries prevent the flow of blood to the heart, he by-passes the "jam" by taking a muscle from the abdomen and attaching it to the heart. The blood reaches the heart through the muscle. Nothing finer in surgery has recently been carried through either in Germany or America. Council hospitals were fully equipped with iron lungs long before the recent scare. Indeed, the type of iron lung adopted by Lord Nuffield as his munificent national gift was developed by the instruction of the L.C.C., and under the supervision of the Council's experts.

Hours worked by L.C.C. nurses have been reduced to 96 per fortnight. New nurses' homes, equipped with separate bedrooms, with hot and cold running water in each, luxurious common rooms and dining-rooms, have been built or are in course of construction.

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The children's hospital at Carshalton, where crippled children are restored to health in rural surroundings, is one of the medical show-places of this country. At Margate there is a convalescent home where, with every freedom and amenities equal to those of a modern seaside hotel, women can recuperate for as little as sixpence a week. Can Moscow show anything better and cheaper?

A feature of the Council's hospital service which has been specially developed in recent years is the provision of laboratories. Group laboratories have been provided, one for each of seven prescribed areas in the Metropolis.

School dentists inspect the teeth of all children in the elementary and central schools once every year, and undertake treatment, if necessary, in the treatment centres. This work is steadily reducing the incidence of dental disease in the schools. There are about 70 centres, financed mainly by the Council, in which children are treated by competent practitioners and specialists for visual defects, enlarged tonsils and adenoids, ringworm, and diseases of the skin, eyes and ears. The Council has one clinic of its own for the diagnosis and treatment of venereal disease, and the fares of patients are paid in case of need.

The L.C.C., together with the London Borough Councils—also democratically elected, and receiving loans from the L.C.C.—have between them housed and re-housed half a million people in recent years. The L.C.C. alone has built 91,000 cottages or flats for 400,000 people. The latest flats are wholly admirable. They are designed by various architects to avoid standardization. Slums are being eradicated fast, and overcrowding surely abated. On this work the Council has spent over £57,000,000; the rent roll of its estates amounts to £3,157,830. The cost of repairs for twelve months is £480,757, and 2,600 men are employed on this work alone.

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Much might be written of the mental health services controlled by the Council. Probably the most important fact is that twenty per cent. of those admitted to the Council's mental hospitals can be said to-day to be cured as against sixteen per cent. ten years ago. With voluntary patients the recovery rate is very much higher. For some years past mental patients specially deserving of the privilege have enjoyed a summer holiday by the sea. Every effort is made to ensure that patients dress as they would in their own homes.

The Dickensian Poor Law taint has been completely eradicated from the Council's institutions. People fit to take care of themselves are encouraged to stay in their own homes, get out-door relief, and keep away from what used to be known as the workhouse. Husbands can now live with their wives and children. Old-age homes are provided for the aged, but the clothes are not standardized as formerly. Inmates are free to go out visiting. They are given allowances of sweets and tobacco, and everything possible is done to safeguard their self-respect and ensure their comfort.

Bands play regularly in the L.C.C. parks and open spaces in summer, and now there is dancing as well. "Lidos" are being provided for each area, the object being to see that every Londoner had an open-air swimming pool within five miles of his or her home. Story-tellers are paid by the Council to amuse the children in the parks! Games of every kind are played; at Hackney Marshes on Sunday over ninety games can be seen in progress at one time. Much has been written of the Green Belt. A large part of the Belt will continue to be used for agricultural purposes or for golf courses. The important thing is that the land will be secure from building, and that within the reach of all Londoners there will be preserved a part of rural England. The Green Belt is situated at an average distance of fifteen miles from the centre of London.

There is a Welfare Office for the homeless on the

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Embankment, where any man or woman is free to walk into the waiting-room. An interviewing officer asks a minimum of questions to discover what form of help is needed. The Welfare Office acts as a clearing station, and from the wide resources of accommodation at its disposal, and in co-operation with various voluntary societies, is able to direct the applicant to the source of assistance best suited to the case. Over 33,000 applicants were dealt with by the Welfare Office in 1937.

Such are some of the activities, taken almost at random, of the London County Council. Many more examples, equally interesting and important, might be given. Together they constitute a remarkable series of achievements, and an outstanding triumph for democracy. If the democratic House of Commons had half as much to its credit for the period since the war democracy in Britain would be in a healthier and prouder state. But those who lament the ineffectiveness, slowness, and reactionary torpor of Parliament and set it down as a democratic failure should in fairness remember the efficiency and success of the L.C.C.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS

SINCE the rise of Sovietism in Russia and of Fascism in Italy, Germany and other States, the citizens of the democratic nations have become conscious of their democracy as never before. Until within little more than twenty years ago the only conceivable alternative to the democratic system of government—the British system—was that of the old absolutist or semi-absolutist Emperors. Few politically minded men in the north and west of Europe or in the Western Hemisphere would have contended, even in their most exasperated moments, that such Imperial rule was preferable, or even on balance only slightly inferior, to the democratic scheme of constitutional king or president and elected legislative chambers. In short, democracy was taken for granted. The general idea was that in the natural course of events the whole world would become democratic. As the peoples in the Empires became more politically educated, “progress” would prevail. They would throw off the rule of their Imperial masters and copy the forms of government of the more “advanced” nations. They have not done so, and democracy is no longer taken for granted. It is challenged; there are rival systems; so far from being advanced it is now old-fashioned.

It is reasonably obvious that democracy should be more than a system of government; it should be a national comradeship. Is the British national comradeship as great and as close as the German, the Italian, the Russian? Though ultimate proof is not

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forthcoming, it may fairly be doubted. The great mass of the British people are intensely patriotic, and they are stubborn fighters, but this is not quite the same thing. It is their tradition that they always win the last battle, and it is true that, with the important exceptions of Joan of Arc and General Washington, they have, in the end, beaten every enemy who has stood against them. But in the days of Joan of Arc and of General Washington they were not politically conscious as they are to-day, and they have now many grievances. England does not belong to them, but to comparatively few of their number who are described as landlords; no work can be found for well over a million of them at any one time; the lot of most is a somewhat sombre and anxious poverty. They are kindly, humorous, and extraordinarily patient. Will they always be so? Surprising things sometimes happen in national affairs. Might the British people decide some day that their vaunted democracy has failed them, that it is a sham, that it gives them the illusion of power while effectively depriving them of all material benefit? Might they so decide, and end it?

But it is not necessary to threaten or hint at revolution. Democracy can exist without the gross blemishes which disfigure it in England. (It does so exist in France and in New Zealand.) They can surely be removed and our democracy made stronger and more perfect. All that is essential is good-will, yoked with application, resolve, and a national determination to save democracy at all costs because it is, for us, the best form of human government. First of all, it must be agreed and passionately believed by a large majority that—short of anarchism, which implies a more perfected state of human nature—democracy is the best available form of human government. But is it?

Mr. Aldous Huxley, whose mind is surely one of the clearest and most impartial of our time, writes in his paper on "Political Democracy": "Has political

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democracy worked, does it work now, and is it likely to go on working in the future? That the lot of ordinary men has been enormously ameliorated in the period during which political democracy has been in practice might seem, at first glance, to constitute an unequivocally affirmative answer. But a little reflection is enough to convince one that it does not. Political democracy and the amelioration of the common lot are not connected in any necessary way. It is perfectly possible for an autocracy or an oligarchy to be humane, and for a democratically organized government to be oppressive. The common man's lot happens to have been improved during the democratic era, and the improvement has been to a great extent directly due to democracy. We may be duly grateful to democracy without allowing our gratitude to blind us to its defects, and without forgetting that the process of amelioration can be continued under other and politically more satisfactory systems."

It is remarkable that this paper was published in 1927, when it was still taken for granted by most people that the process of "amelioration" must depend upon democracy, and that it would automatically cease under any other form of government. We have since seen that "amelioration" may be greater, more widespread, and infinitely swifter and more thorough under governments which gibe at, and repudiate, democracy. So what becomes of the argument from amelioration? And if that goes, what is left?

Mr. Huxley continues: "The inefficiency and weakness of political democracy are most apparent in moments of crisis, when decisions have to be rapidly made and acted upon. To ascertain and tabulate the wishes of many millions of electors in a few hours is a physical impossibility. It follows, therefore, that in a crisis one of two things must happen: either the governors decide and present the accomplished fact of their decision to the electors—in which case the

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whole principle of political democracy will have been treated with the contempt which in critical circumstances it deserved ; or else the people are consulted and time is lost, with often fatal consequences. During the war all the belligerents adopted the first course. Political democracy was everywhere temporarily abolished. A system of government which requires to be abolished every time a danger presents itself can hardly be described as a perfect system.

" The most powerful and stable democratic States are those in which the principles of democracy have been least logically and consistently applied. The weakest are the most democratic. Thus a Parliament elected under a scheme of proportional representation, is a truly democratic Parliament. But it is also, in most cases, an instrument not of rule but of anarchy. Proportional representation guarantees that all shades of opinion shall be represented in the assembly. It is the ideal of democracy fulfilled. Unfortunately, the multiplication of small groups within the Parliament makes the formation of a stable and powerful government impossible. . . . Proportional representation in Italy led through anarchy to Fascism. . . . Stable democratic governments are found in countries where minorities, however large, are unrepresented, and where no candidate who does not belong to one of the great Parties has the slightest chance of being elected. Parliaments in such countries are not in the least representative of the people. They are thoroughly undemocratic. But they possess one great merit which makes up for all their defects : they can form governments strong enough to govern."

There is so much general truth in this that it is not necessary to attempt to argue out the advantages and disadvantages of proportional representation. Nations which are narrowly divided between two great Parties—between two ideologies, in the latest phrase—become deadlocked and impotent. It is certain that one of the

reasons for the triumph of National Socialism in Germany was the fine and unchanging balance between Right and Left which effectively prevented strong government action of either kind. More recently, a similar state of affairs in Spain led to the violence of exasperation and from that to civil war. It is equally certain that the present National Government in Britain represents little more, if any, than a bare half of the nation. If, however, this narrow division of opinion were exactly reflected in the House of Commons satisfactory government would be impossible, whether the actual majority of three or four were National or Labour. There is a real problem here ; one of the major problems of democracy.

"Government of whatever kind is superior to anarchy," Mr. Huxley goes on. "We must be thankful for a system which gives us stable government, even when, as happens only too frequently in democratic countries, the men who direct the government are charlatans and rogues.

"We may feel sincerely sorry," he adds, "for people who through no fault of their own have found themselves saddled with a Nero, a King John, or a Kaiser Wilhelm the Second. But for those who of their own free-will elect a Bottomley as their parliamentary representative, a Big Bill Thompson as their Mayor (not once but, in spite of the first disastrous experiment, a second time) one can feel less sympathy."

Mr. Huxley's remedy to improve the quality of the elected representatives of the people is the startling and amusing one of examinations for M.P.'s.

"It would be possible," he says, "without making any radical changes in the existing system, to improve the quality of the legislative assembly simply by demanding from the legislator the same proofs of competence as are demanded from every administrator. If nobody were allowed to stand for Parliament who had not shown himself at least capable of entering

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the higher grades of the Civil Service, Parliament would automatically be purged of many of its worst incompetents and charlatans. It is possible that if this test were imposed a few men of real merit might be excluded, but their loss would be compensated by the exclusion of so many merely talkative and merely rich or influential people, so many ignorant quacks and rogues. If at the same time the right to vote were made contingent on the ability to pass a fairly stiff intelligence test—if nobody were allowed to participate in the government of the country who was not mentally at least fifteen years old—it is probable that the influence of demagogues and newspapers would be considerably reduced. Adults are more judicious, less easily suggestible, than children."

A measure imposing examinations for would-be M.P.'s and voters is hardly likely to be passed by Parliament itself or approved by the electorate, especially at a time when the whole system of competitive examinations is being attacked and disparaged. There is, however, much to be said for it, and in a more perfect State than our own some such test would probably be applied, but it is hardly an immediately practicable remedy. Moreover, as Mr. Huxley admits, such a system would approximate to an aristocracy of intelligence, and therefore be the negation of democracy as we have been taught to understand and accept it. It would be revolution, no less, and can only be considered as an alternative to democracy, not as an improvement in its general scheme. What improvements, then, are practicable?

It is suggested here that the root of the trouble in our democratic State is economic. It is impossible to have national comradeship where there is gross inequality in the distribution of the national wealth. Sentimental patriots will find this theory hard to swallow. It is their dream—those who indulge in the dream usually have comfortable incomes and what is

called an assured position in life—that inequality of means doesn't matter ; that we are all Englishmen together ; that it is right and proper for the poor to remain in their station, for the rich to relieve their necessities, if any, and be suitably thanked. This rather touching theory finds little support among the poor themselves, particularly in the towns, and is, moreover, dead against the whole modern political trend. Even Fascism does not support it, at least in its crude and nineteenth-century form. A fair analogy may be drawn from the ordinary family. It is almost impossible for true brotherliness to exist where one brother has much and another less than enough. Envy and a sense of injustice on the one hand, impatience on the other, are inevitable.

There is, it is well known, a strong disinclination on the part of the comfortably circumstanced to permit the intrusion of economic considerations into a political discussion. They prefer to regard the poverty-and-income issue as irrelevant. There always have been classes, they argue ; there are always likely to be classes. There are different grades of class and of wealth in every country in the world save Russia, and there the change is not a success. Even in Russia, technicians are paid more than ordinary labourers, and the Commissars do themselves pretty well.

Such persons agree that poverty is a distressing thing and should be alleviated ; but, after all, they argue, isn't a great deal done for the poor already ? The working classes have nearly everything given them free. If they lose their job, they get unemployment benefit, or failing that, outdoor relief. Their children are educated free, they get free medical service. There are a hundred charitable agencies to give them free food, free clothing, free coal on one pretext or another. What more do they want ? They know nothing of the agonies of a middle class man of limited income faced with his quarterly bills. If such a man has a

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bad year he has to fend for himself; if he has a good year the State takes a quarter of his income, or even more. The poor may live from hand to mouth, but there is a great deal to be said for such a life; they at least do not suffer from the middle class man's nightmare of slipping down in the social scale and being unable to provide his children with the education he received himself; of being unable to supply his wife with the comforts to which she was accustomed in her father's home.

There is much in these arguments, but not enough. They are usually uttered by people living in the prosperous and comfortable south; people to whom travelling in a bus instead of their own car is a hardship; women for whom being totally without servants and obliged to do their own housework is an enormity. All classes have a wide range, and it is unwise to generalize about any of them too freely, but the facts speak for themselves. As these words are written the number of unemployed has fallen to 1,492,282. This is the lowest figure since December 1937. If a million and a half be taken as a fair average, and each unit in the total be regarded as representing three others—that is, a wife and two children—it means that there are six million persons in the country living on public alms. For the great majority of these life cannot possibly be a reasonably full and enjoyable experience by any standards whatever. A large proportion of them must be underfed, ill-clothed, devoid of cheer and generally wretched. Until this running sore of unemployment among the people is cleansed, cauterized and healed, our democracy cannot be healthy, cannot be safe. Is there any hope that British democracy, by drastic remedial action, will cure this wound in its own body? The evil has existed since the war and before, and nothing has been done hitherto. *But the totalitarian States have found a cure and applied it!* Democracy, it seems, with its large middle class vote

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shrinks from the vigorous, resolute action which alone can end the disease. To carry the metaphor further, it flinches from the necessary operation.

With unemployment ended, the worst incidence of poverty would disappear. But in many trades harsh under-payment still remains to be dealt with. The railwaymen are demanding a minimum wage of 50s. a week. It is not much to ask. The agricultural workers are infinitely worse off. Their average wage is 32s. 6d. a week. It is nothing short of monstrous that these men, upon whose skilled labour all ultimately turns, should be offered this beggarly pay and be treated, in addition, more as serfs than as free citizens. Here, in the misuse and starvation of the land and its people, is another running sore in the body of British democracy. Is there any hope whatever that Parliament, as at present constituted, with an electorate in its present mind, will ever deal with the twin problem of idle acres and idle men on the firm, revolutionary lines which alone will solve it, will break up the big estates by force of law and recreate a British peasantry tilling their own fields, growing their own food—a solid, immovable base of contented people upon which the democratic State can rest? Is there any reasonable hope at all that such will be done by constitutional legislative action?

One hears it said that what we need is a leader. Leaders do not seem to rise and flourish in modern democracies. Immediately a politician shows signs of being a leader a plot is laid against him by the mediocrities. A man with theories, who desires urgently to get something done, who is not bound by past precedents and is willing to take risks, is deeply distrusted by the House of Commons. It is fair to add that he is distrusted by the electorate too. The last leader in the real sense that this country had was Mr. Lloyd George. He brought us through the worst crisis in our history. To-day, because of the obscure,

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devious workings of the political game at Westminster, he is a man without a Party, a mere critical voice and nothing more. With better fortune, with a less lethargic, hide-bound electorate to support him, he might have got the people back on to the land and brought us other overdue reforms. It is possible there are comparatively young men on both sides of the House with the qualities of a leader in them, but it is fairly certain they will never be allowed to exercise those qualities. The elderly politicians will see to that. They will eat their hearts out in obscurity ; or, if they reach the Cabinet and show any marked signs of independence and imagination, they will be promptly put out again. Yet leaders can, with difficulty, arise even in democracies. The United States found one in Mr. Franklin D. Roosevelt, and it may be that France has found her leader in M. Daladier.

If we leave the economic field and consider the less tangible defects of British democracy we are confronted at once with the anachronisms and irritating absurdities of the class system. No democracy can be sound, healthy, and satisfied in which a section of the population are brought up to regard themselves as superior beings with superior rights because they have property, have been educated at certain reserved schools, and speak with a distinctive accent. To the economic disorder and dissatisfactions of the State is added this class barrier with its irritating suspicion and discontent. To argue that the system is inevitable is nonsense. It does not exist in France, nor in the Dominions, nor to anything like the same degree in the United States. But, again, it may be asked, what possible hope exists that any foreseeable Government in Britain will take even the first steps towards true national equality? For this age-long, mouldering evil can only be ended by determined, vigorous action. The suggested necessary processes of legislation may be summarized thus :

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Abolition of the House of Lords and all hereditary titles save only those of the King and his immediate relatives.

Institution of a completely classless education. All children to attend the same schools. An infinitely extended system of scholarships, ensuring that only pupils with the best brains reach the universities.

Provision that all officers in the Navy, Army, and Air Force serve previously for at least a year in the ranks.

These proposals may seem wildly revolutionary to many. They should not, for they are essential to a well founded, orderly and genuine democracy. What chance exists of their enactment by this democracy for which we may soon be all called upon to fight to the death?

Unemployment and poverty poison the democratic spirit; class divisions, prejudices and misunderstandings embitter it. It is possible, unhappily, that the British people may soon be thrust again into the desperate comradeship of war. If we lose that war our bad institutions and our good institutions alike may very probably come to a catastrophic end. The ancient British compromise which for so long has called itself one thing while it is really another will go the way of all political devices for the safe government of a subject class. If we won another war, would things slip back into the old groove again? It is more than likely. Those still in early middle age will remember the spirit of 1914. There was a brave phrase, "The comradeship of the trenches." After the war another phrase was used, "Homes fit for heroes to live in." It has been misquoted; it was an aspiration, not a promise, but it certainly reflected the mind of the nation at that time. Nothing, it was felt, could be the same again; a new fraternal England would come from the furnace of war; employers and workmen, public school boys and street urchins, gentlemen and labourers, were bound mystically by the shedding of blood, by a common

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danger faced and overcome, by victory jointly achieved. The hope has been dissipated ; if the phrases are repeated in a new emergency they will have lost their freshness and sincerity, they will no longer pass as current and acceptable coin.

If it be an exaggeration to describe democracy in Britain as a failure, it is equally an understatement to let it pass as merely an imperfect attempt in an imperfect world. There are better democracies in being to serve as models ; our own could be improved and made reasonably thorough with comparative ease. What, then, prevents this ? In part, the ancientness of the State, in which the old, the romantic, and the picturesque seem inextricably mingled with the false-antique, the time-worn which is honoured not for its own sake but because it is to the interest of a class or a group to retain it. We are an island ; we have never known cataclysmic change ; shreds and remnants of feudalism and aristocracy linger on amongst us, it is to the benefit of some that they should. A smiling apology, half sincere, half interested, is often made for these survivals, but those who apologize are in general less concerned with the ancient forms—the baronial title, the ancient abbey, the fifteenth-century school or college—than with the exclusiveness and superiority they confer. At the most, they may be beautiful, grave, reverend and gracious with the charm of vanished years, but they are not democratic. And in too many cases they are sheer sham and façade, behind which one may detect the hard faces of big business, avarice, and class selfishness.

It may be admitted that the British people as a whole have a certain sentimental fondness for old ceremonials, customs and usages, and are inclined to blink their fettering and undemocratic effect. It is said that they dearly love a lord, and in accepting his title they accept his prerogatives and those of his nephews, cousins, and grandchildren too. The English race in

particular are extraordinarily humble and subservient, not to say servile, in some of their moods, and seem to have a natural aptitude for cap-touching and deference to almost any one who cares to impose himself as one of their betters. Is this a cause or the result of many centuries of class domination?

The reflection brings us to a last consideration: Are the English people as a whole temperamentally fitted for democracy, that is, a democracy pure, clear-cut, and genuine? They appear to care little for political abstractions. The phrase, "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity," surely the noblest political watchword ever framed, has never made much appeal to them, nor do they seem even to understand it. There is something ineffably kindly, tolerant—and stupid—about the bulk of our working masses. They ask little more than to be allowed to earn a living and to be let alone, and are not given even so much as that. Yet they founded the Trade Union movement, and colonized—was it they or the freer, better-fed middle classes who officered them?—a fifth of the habitable globe. There is little wonder the British puzzle foreigners; they are an abiding mystery even to ourselves.

They have a profound and never-failing gift for being deceived by specious humbug. They cannot grasp the clear, the forthright, the logical. They never appear wholly to trust or understand any leader who does not wrap up his message to them in covering after covering of comfortable, meaningless platitude. A recent Prime Minister, accounted a great success in his day, worked steadily against their interests throughout his period of power, made the most amazing errors of judgment, was proved wrong by events again and again, yet remained with most of them trusted and liked because he seldom made a speech without telling them he was just a common Englishman like themselves, a hater of frills, pomp, and pretence, one who would infinitely rather spend his life in the fields of

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his native Worcestershire than in the seat of the mighty. The trick never failed ; is there any reason to suppose it will fail the next time it is played ? Are other nations so simple, so easily beguiled ? It is difficult to know. Certain it is that healthy scepticism has no root in the English mind.

If these assertions are true, it follows that the English people have already as great a measure of democracy as they are fit to use. They get, in short, the kind of government they deserve. Those who are impatient beneath its shams and incompleteness must bear their lot. But, like all generalizations about a nation, they are only half true. It is impossible, in a few sentences, to tell the truth about England. It may pass, nevertheless, as approximately accurate to say that a majority of the best individual Englishmen and Englishwomen earnestly desire to abolish poverty and unemployment and give reasonable opportunity to all children born even at the cost of some sacrifice to themselves. They shrink equally from Communism on the one hand and Fascism on the other. Is there a middle course ? We must assume that there is ; that the English genius, which led the world in the enfranchisement of the working masses, and, in some respects, the amelioration of their lot, will yet find a way to prove that authoritarian government is not necessary, that democracy, though in the shadow, is not finally discredited, that its best achievements are yet to come.

What is required is a democratic revival, in the religious sense. There must be a change of heart, not in the many, for that is impossible, but in the young, the eager, the well-intentioned. The middle classes should lead this crusade for equality—they have led every worth-while movement in Britain—and the working class must forget their snobbery and subservience and be strong and vigilant in enforcing their rights. Greater changes—for good and evil—have been wrought in England than this. We may yet set

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another example to the world. If democracy is saved in Britain it is saved everywhere. It should be a good fight, with good hope of success.

Some years ago a judge in an English court was trying a man for stealing. The jury, after long deliberation, found the man not guilty. Addressing him, the judge said in reference to his past record: "You know and I know what the jury don't know. Now go away and be very careful in the future."

Remembering that this examination has been in some sense a trial, we may, with similar words of caution, dismiss democracy from the dock.

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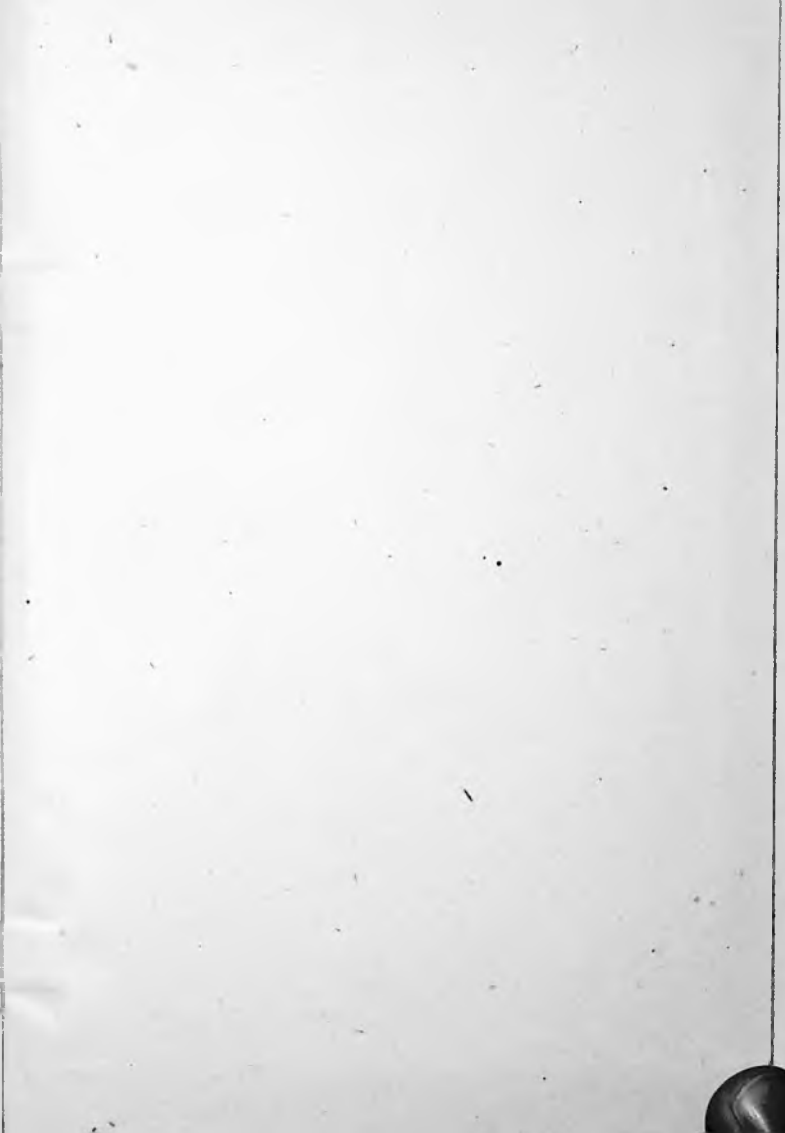
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